William Archer

2/8/15 £3

THE HERO OF HERAT

IN THE SAME SERIES

THE OLD DOMINION	MARY JOHNSTON.
THE PROFESSIONAL AUNT	MRS. GEORGE WEMYSS.
IN THE QUARTER	R. W. CHAMBERS.
BY ORDER OF THE COMPANY	MARY JOHNSTON.
THE CORNER OF HARLEY STREET	PETER HARDING, M.D.
QUEED	HENRY SYDNOR HARRISON.
SIR MORTIMER	MARY JOHNSTON.
THE PRIVATE PAPERS OF HENRY RYECROFT	GEORGE GISSING.
AUDREY	MARY JOHNSTON.
SELECTED POEMS	GEORGE MEREDITH.
GHOSTS OF PICCADILLY	G. S. STREET.
LEWIS RAND	MARY JOHNSTON.
AN UNSOCIAL SOCIALIST	BERNARD SHAW.
BACHELOR BETTY	WINIFRED JAMES.
THE IRRATIONAL KNOT	BERNARD SHAW.
LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME	JOHN FOX, Jun.
LOVE AMONG THE ARTISTS	BERNARD SHAW.
THE HOUSE OF COBWEBS	GEORGE GISSING.
CASHEL BYRON'S PROFESSION	BERNARD SHAW.
NEW WORLDS FOR OLD	H. G. WELLS.
THE HERO OF HERAT	MAUD DIVER.
PETER MOOR	GUSTAV FRENSSEN.
THE FIGHTING CHANCE	R. W. CHAMBERS.
HUMAN BULLETS	LIEUT. SAKURAI.
WILL WARBURTON	GEORGE GISSING.
LOST IN THE POST	F. A. LUTYENS.
JEWEL	C. L. BURNHAM.
THOUGHTS ON LIFE AND RELIGION	MAX MULLER.
LOVE LETTERS OF A WORLDLY WOMAN	MRS. W. K. CLIFFORD.
PAN-GERMANISM	ROLAND USHER.

THE
HERO OF HERAT

A FRONTIER BIOGRAPHY IN ROMANTIC FORM

BY

MAUD DIVER

AUTHOR OF

"THE JUDGMENT OF THE SWORD," "CAPT. DESMOND, V.C.," ETC.

"India, fertile in heroes, has shown since the days of Clive no man of greater or earlier promise than Eldred Pottinger. Yet hero as he was, you might have sat for weeks beside him at table and never discovered that he had seen a shot fired."
—SIR HENRY LAWRENCE, K.C.B.

"Things gained, are gone,
But great things done—endure."—SWINBURNE.

LONDON

CONSTABLE & COMPANY LTD.

First published . . . . . *September*, 1912
Reprinted . . . . . *October* 1, 1912
,, ... *October* 10, 1912
,, ... *January*, 1913
,, ... *February* 4, 1913
,, ... *February* 13, 1913
,, ... *May*, 1914
,, ... *June*, 1915

TO

MY HUSBAND AND READY HELPER

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

M. D.

NOTE OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In these days of hurried reading and writing the preface proper has almost died the death. But in giving an artistic form to the life study of an actual man it becomes needful to forestall the natural imputation that such a form may have been used as a cloak for inaccuracy, or as a means of "improving" upon life by a judicious seasoning of fact with fiction.

For this reason I would have it clearly understood that no pains have been spared to make this, in every sense, a true record of the man and of the stirring events in which he took part. Even in respect of conversations, which must of necessity be clothed with words of my own, I have introduced very few—save among minor native characters—of which the gist is not given either in personal accounts or in Pottinger's long and detailed letters to Government from Herāt.

Above all, in touching upon the many delicate and difficult points in that chapter of blunders and disasters, the first Afghan War, I have done my utmost to see clearly and present fairly a very complex subject, and have set down nothing—whether it were fact or speech of those concerned—that I have not verified more than once in the many personal and historical accounts I have studied during the last two years.

It only remains that I tender my grateful thanks and acknowledgments to all those who have in any way helped me to make this record of a brave man's career as

complete and truthful as I could wish; more especially to the present Major Eldred Pottinger, R.A., and other members of his family for the use of letters, journals, and photographs; to Major Broadfoot, R.E., and Mrs. Colin Mackenzie, whose first edition of Sir Vincent Eyre's journal, interleaved with her husband's notes, proved a mine of wealth; to the Record Office authorities in Calcutta and Bombay for copies of letters not to be found at home; and, above all, to the India Office authorities in London for countless books borrowed and for free access to the MS. Records, whence I drew all that is told of Herāt in Book III, from Pottinger's own letters to Government, and without which the story of his life would have been lamentably incomplete.

The authorities most frequently quoted are Sir John Kaye and Sir Henry Durand.

With regard to the problem of spelling Indian and Afghan names it seemed best, in most cases, to adopt the more modern fashion, and the following short guide to vowel sounds should obviate mispronunciation—

ā = *ar.*	in = *een.*
a = *u* in *but.*	ai = as *i* in *vine.*
i = *ee.*	ō = as in *note.*
ir = *eer.*	u = *oo.*

MAUD DIVER.

THE BIRCHES,
HASLEMERE,
September 1911.

INTERPRETATION

"A HERO? I don't quite know what that is. But I imagine a hero is a man who does what he can. The others do not."

Thus Romain Rolland in *Jean Christophe:* and a definition so low-toned, so entirely devoid of cheap glamour, seems a fitting introduction to a hero as incurably modest as he was essentially heroic in the largest sense of that much-abused word.

But men died early in those tumultuous decades when the last half of our Indian Empire was in the making; and to Eldred Pottinger the end came before he had attained to the fullness of power that was in him. For a few years England and India resounded with his name. Again a few years and Death overtook him. By then India was upon the eve of the first Sikh War, that brought to birth—as is the way of war—a fresh outcrop of heroes. '47 brought the second Sikh War; '49 the conquest of the Punjab; '57 the Great Revolt. Indian events moved swiftly in those days; heroes multiplied; and, with the inexorable onward sweep of history, the man who had writ his name upon one page of it slipped out of the minds of all save students of that particular period.

"So little is now remembered of this self-denying, heroic officer," wrote Mrs. Colin Mackenzie in '79, and in 1912 how much less! Of what avail, then, to record the remarkable events of Eldred Pottinger's all too brief

career in a "Life" of the usual pattern? Considering this, I have chosen rather to make it the basis of a character study worked out through the chances and changes of that disastrous historical drama—the first Afghan War.

For closer acquaintance with the man reveals a character peculiarly well worth considering in detail by a generation of English men and women who tend, more and more, to set expedience above principle, and to rate personal success—however ephemeral, however attained—as a man's sole claim to distinction.

In the lucrative qualities, admired of a commercial age, Eldred Pottinger was woefully lacking. He had neither moral adaptability nor personal push. None the less did he achieve his hour of glory; though it must be confessed he stumbled upon it almost in his own despite, and certainly failed to make capital of it from a worldly point of view. Fool or idealist—which you will: it all hinges on the point of view. Yet, fool or no, "England needs Pottingers, not place-seekers," though she only admits that need in the hour of national trouble; and, even so, appreciates them best at a distance or wherever her trouble is acute. In times of peace, when men worship the golden calf called Business, when their souls are dwarfed by its monetary standards, its mean and selfish expedients, England frankly prefers the man of talent to the man of great character. His ready pliability, his keen eye to the main chance, and, above all, his tact in accepting, without seeming to perceive, his senior's commercial view of life, make him infinitely simpler and pleasanter to deal with; while England, confident in her long-suffering Star, justifies herself by the not unfounded reflection that *when* the crisis comes, there will be no lack of "uncomfortable, irritating heroes to pick her chestnuts out of the fire."

So it ever has been; so, no doubt, it ever will be; and of such was Eldred Pottinger, in all respects true to type; though in him the more effective heroism of the born fighter was infused and mellowed by the innate, self-effacing heroism of the man. In truth, during his short eventful spell of Afghan service, his soldierly qualities seldom had full scope. Those years of suffering and fortitude, culminating in misinterpretation and injustice, tended rather to strengthen the unquestioning religious faith, the large nobility of soul, which he shared with that galaxy of men—Nicholson, Outram, the Lawrences, to name but a few—who established British rule in the Punjab, and established also an ideal of British character that remains unshaken to this day. It is a significant feature of that same galaxy that none among them was ashamed to show forth his faith in God—whether to white men or brown—not only with his lips, but with his life. Far from faultless, and differing widely, with all the individual differences of strong natures, in this respect they were as one man—they feared God; but they feared nothing else in heaven or earth.

To this immortal company Eldred Pottinger indubitably belongs. Had the Mutiny come about earlier, or had he even lived through the Sikh wars, his name would have been set beside theirs upon India's scroll of honour. Instead—like those noble brothers, the Broadfoots and Conollys—he died untimely and was too soon forgotten: though that "untimely death," writes Henry Lawrence, "adds tenderness to the interest with which we treasure up all recollections of him."

Yet in one regard he stands apart even from these; lacking, as he does, the slightly self-conscious, didactic and, in some cases, narrow religiosity of the true Early Victorian type. His letters and journals are singularly

free from that distinctive note of the period. He had something of the modern man's reserve in the matter of religion; while yet the simple, selfless spontaneity of his good impulses links him rather with the earlier pioneer saints of Christendom: not the devotees of hair shirt, knotted cord and morbid self-abasement; but the type inimitably etched by Coventry Patmore in a passage worth quoting since it portrays with singular felicity the inmost nature of the man—

> "The 'Saint' has no fads. You may live in the same house with him and never find out that he is not a sinner like yourself; unless you rely on negative proofs, or obtrude lax ideas on him, and so provoke him to silence. . . . On the whole he will give you an agreeable impression of general inferiority to yourself. You must not, however, presume on this inferiority so far as to offer him an affront: for he will be sure to answer you with some quiet, unexpected remark, showing a presence of mind—arising, I suppose, from the presence of God—which will make you feel you have struck a rock and only shaken your own shoulder. If you compel him to speak about religion he will probably surprise and scandalize you by the childishness of his thoughts."

And here is the conclusion of the whole matter—

> "The Saint does everything that any other decent person does; only somewhat better and with a totally different motive."

In those two words you have the keynote of the whole. However humanly faulty, or fallible in action, yet from first to last, purity of motive stamped and revealed the man. He himself, I doubt not, is, by this time fore-

damned in the eyes of a livelier generation, among whom, too often, the old-time fear of the Lord has given place to a genuine and over-mastering fear of being bored; a conviction that virtue spells dullness and should be concealed, like a vice, from a world that must at all costs be amused. That the virtuous may be—and too often are—supremely dull, is no argument in point, since their dullness arises not from the lamentable fact that they are good; but from the still more lamentable fact that their goodness is merely negative—like themselves.

Now there is a vague general impression abroad, one hard to be dispelled, that virtue itself is negative, and vice positive, therefore attractive. Never was a statement so fundamentally false. The very derivation of the word (virtue) warns us that it is something positive, expressing itself in action, not in mere refraining; and when one has ventured to label a man "Saint," there is imperative need to insist upon this vital quality of action; to reiterate, even at the risk of lapsing into a truism that "virtue is strong where character is strong; and strong character has its perilous imperfections."

So with Eldred Pottinger; for all his quiet self-effacement and power of endurance, the man was a soldier in the grain; and as such essentially masculine, positive, hot-blooded: a force to be reckoned with, whatever his environment, and a force that made for righteousness as water makes for its own level. His courage, moral and physical, was equal to any occasion. He could and did suffer all things in a resolute stillness; but he would not suffer evil unrebuked. He would come to no compromise with the world and its shifty standards of conduct, even were it to avoid friction with his seniors. In consequence, like Nicholson—with whom he had much in common—he was seldom popular with those same

seniors, and society at large found him a dull fellow enough.

Witness Sir John Kaye's account of Calcutta's failure to lionize him, when he appeared there as the hero of Herāt—

> "The impression he made upon society in general was not favourable. He was shy and reserved and unwilling to speak of himself. He did not realize, in his person, his conversation or his manner, their idea of a youthful hero, and therefore thoughtless people were disappointed. But to the more thoughtful few he appeared precisely the man from whom such good deeds, as had made him famous, were to be expected. Heroism takes many shapes. In Eldred Pottinger it took the shape of a sturdy, indomitable perseverance—a courage, great in resistance to overwhelming odds; but there was nothing showy or impetuous about it. In all these respects the personal aspect and demeanour of the man represented his inward qūalities."

And it is the privilege of all who attempt the high task of recreating such men to reveal the hidden workings of those very inward qualities in so far as a process so secret can be truthfully set forth.

In Eldred Pottinger's case the attempt at recreation has not been made easier by the man's exceeding reserve and incapacity for self-expression; nor by the fact that many of his most important letters and journals have been irrevocably lost; notably the detailed journal from May 1837 to September 1839, which contained the sole existing account of the Herāt siege from within the walls. All that now remains of the original are extracts given in Sir John Kaye's history of the first Afghan War.

The probability is that the MS. was burnt with many other precious documents in a disastrous fire that broke out in Kaye's rooms.

Whether or no Eldred Pottinger left a lasting mark on the stormy history of his time is, after all, a matter of little moment. The unfinished column may yet bear the stamp of perfection; and the man's greatness stands assured by qualities of character, common not merely to his own nation and period, but to the heroes of all nations, for all time. And if, as I hope to prove, his acquaintance is worth making, simply by reason of what he was, the interest of his personal story is heightened and enlarged by the fact that he was fated to play a leading part in one of the darkest political dramas of our Anglo-Indian experience: a drama springing from an initial act of injustice and thereinafter moving on, with cumulative, grim intensity, to the inevitable end.

But no tragedy enacted by man, that "most strange and consoling of earth's meteors," can be so altogether dark, that true insight shall fail to discern one window which looks to the sky.

"And have we wept,
And have we quailed with fears?
Or shrunk with horror? Sure reward
Have we, whom knowledge crowns,—
Who see, thro' mould, the rose unfold,
The soul, thro' blood and tears."

CONTENTS

PAGE

BOOK I

EXPLORER 1

BOOK II

SOLDIER 75

BOOK III

SOLDIER–POLITICAL 175

ILLUSTRATIONS

SKETCH-MAP OF AFGHANISTAN AND NORTHERN INDIA
At end of Book

BOOK I

EXPLORER

Hail and farewell! I must arise,
  Leave here the fatted cattle;
And paint on foreign lands and skies
  My Odyssey of battle.

The untented Kosmos my abode—
  I pass,—a wilful stranger;
My Mistress still the open road
  And the bright eyes of Danger.

Come ill or well, the cross, the crown,
  The rainbow or the thunder—
I fling my soul and body down,
  For God to plough them under.

R. L. S.

I

"Behold, Sahib—nestling, like a bride in the rough embrace of the hills—Kabul, City of Orchards!"

The speaker, a benevolent-looking Syud [1] from Pishin, drew rein in speaking, and pride vibrated in his tone, as he turned to gauge the impression made on his companion, who had rather the aspect of a fair-skinned Afghan merchant than of a Sahib. Only the clear Irish blue of his eyes betrayed him and the quiet deep-toned voice when he made answer: "Truly a jewel among valleys, Syud-jee: a jewel that gleams the fairer for its rugged setting."

The Afghan nodded, well content; and there fell a long silence, while Eldred Pottinger looked away across the valley, his adventurous spirit stirred, not so much by beauty seen, as by the nameless magnetism of the Other Side.

Yet, for the moment, it was almost enough to realize that at last, after seventy-five days of rough going, hardship and hazard, he had achieved the first stage of his journey toward the ultimate, unseen goal of his dreams: to feast eyes and mind upon that jewel among valleys wedged between granite heights that darkly challenged the blue; their scarred summits loftier and more rugged than any he had yet seen. For now the northward view culminated in towering snow-peaks of the Hindu Kush; peaks with which he was to become tragic-

[1] Holy man.

ally intimate before his work in this stony-hearted region was done. He was destined also to see the City of Orchards under aspects many and terrible: but never, surely, did he forget that first vision of her, veiled, like some purdah princess, beneath a *sári* wrought in green and silver and rose, with all the blossoms of all the fruit trees in the world. But beneath her silver *sári* this princess was a libertine at heart; even as her women behind their latticed *boorkhas* were past mistresses in the immemorial art of intrigue; and her men, beneath their hospitality, courage and rough good-humour, were unequalled in cunning, cruelty and revenge.

None the less, in outward seeming, no city on earth could show fairer than Kabul in this her season of resurrection after the long dominion of snow. For beyond the orchards lay the cornfields, still pools of jade rippled by a light wind from the north, that blows year in, year out, giving all the trees a southward tilt. And beyond the fields upon every ledge and terrace, vineyards, vineyards and again vineyards, set in long furrows that ensured the young plants much of sun and little of wind. Even up the snow-crowned slopes of the Pughman hills, that merge into the Hindu Kush, furrow climbed beyond furrow, till it was hard to see where cultivation ended and wild began.

And there were gardens also, aflame with colour: the King's garden upon the north side of the city; and on the west, flower-filled terraces climbed to Báber's tomb; the purity of the marble gleaming undimmed from out the dark of massed evergreens and giant planes. Below, upon the plain, a great lake slept in silver, and Kabul river, drunk with new libations from the hills, went swirling and singing through an avenue of mulberry trees, their young leaves gleaming like amber in the sun.

Only the hills overhanging the city seemed to stand savagely aloof, black and castellated masses of rock unresponsive to the throb of life; their lower spurs crowned, fitly, by a grey citadel fortress, the Bala Hissar of all big Afghan towns. In Kabul it served alike for royal palace and prison and fort. Set very high and doubly fortified, with machicolated ramparts and bastions, it was the one point of strength in a capital singularly defenceless, though all the near hills bristled with ineffectual walls, by way of defence against marauding chiefs.

And Eldred Pottinger's gaze, following his thoughts, lingered, not upon Kabul and her orchards, but upon those same harsh overhanging hills, through which ran the direct route to Herāt, that he must by all means be the first of his race to tread. At the prospect a gleam of anticipation lightened his grave eyes, and he turned eagerly upon the good friend who had led him in safety through the wild districts between Kabul and Pishin.

"How long, think you, must I tarry in your City of Orchards before it is possible to push on across the Hazara highlands?" [1]

Syud Mohun Shah gravely considered the young, steadfast face. "Your Honour's heart is set on reaching Herāt by way of that perilous, unfriendly country, wherein no Feringhi [2] hath ventured yet?"

Yes, for that very reason his Honour's heart was set upon the daring project. His decisive nod signified as much; and the Syud—not all unacquainted with the pertinacity of the young British officer—beamed genially, in spite of disapproval.

"Then must the Sahib rest content to bide, yet awhile, in Kabul City, and study to achieve a disguise more complete than any assumed hitherto. Give ear—O son

[1] See Map at the end. [2] Foreigner.

of heroes!—to the voice of wisdom. In this land, if a stranger would travel unmolested, he must be either a holy man or a Sahib."

"And in the Hazara country, where Sahibs come not, he is condemned to holiness!" Pottinger inferred, smiling. "An art difficult to acquire."

"Nay, but for holiness of the heart your Honour standeth already in high repute. Only to gain knowledge of outward forms, that are the garment of the spirit, there is need for closer study of Afghan custom and doctrine. In this respect I would commend my proven friends, Syud Ahmed and Syud Hussain, honest men, both, and good Sunnis; Hussain, in particular, being learned in the law. It hath been told me that they have business in Herāt this summer. If they will adventure in the Hazara region, and if your Honour will agree to join them, in the guise of a Sunni Mahomedan, all may yet go well."

"Agree? It is for your friends to agree rather, Syud-jee. If they will accept the risk of escorting a stranger, unpractised and clumsy at concealment, I can only prove my gratitude by studying to make that risk as slight as may be. For yourself, my friend, I know not how to requite your unfailing care and service in these two weeks."

"Nay, nay, Sahib, that is a trifling matter," the good man protested, genuinely moved. "It is but as a bucket of water from the deep well of my desire to be counted a true friend of the English and find favour in the eyes of their Government. On reaching Kabul, if your Honour permit, I go at once to the good Nawab Jubbur Khan. If there be one corner of Afghanistan where men of your race be welcome, it is at the Court of Dōst Mahomed Khan, *Amir-i-Kabir*." [1]

[1] The great Amir.

Pottinger nodded, well content. "Even so I have heard. Let us go forward then, without more delay. But remember, no word of my further journey, save to those I shall join."

"Fear not, Sahib. In all other company I am dumb as a week-old corpse! Let us go on."

They went on accordingly: a shabby cavalcade of hill ponies and baggage mules, so much the worse for travel that they could scarce achieve the last few miles. And Eldred Pottinger, riding ahead along the narrow track, forgot the ache of weariness in his limbs because of the high hope in his heart.

Two months earlier he had left, without a pang, such society and civilization as obtained on the Sindh frontier in the first year of Victoria's reign, and fared forth towards Afghanistan and adventure by the little-known Beloochistan route, which, in those restless days of expansion, was reckoned the road to fame.

But of the last Eldred Pottinger dreamed not at all. The spell of the North-west Border country, and the true explorer's zest for the unknown—these had been the spurs that pricked him forward upon a year-long journey of uncertain issue, but of certain hardship, hazard and banishment from his kind.

His first step northward had been achieved by an exchange from the Bombay Artillery into the Kutch Irregular Horse. Here cavalry experience had been added to gunnery practice; and he had gone through the mill of frontier outpost duty, a mill unrivalled then, as now, for conjuring raw boys into soldiers of the first quality. Here, too, he had come into close contact with his uncle, Colonel Henry Pottinger, then Resident in Kutch: a political of high character, already marked for distinction. He knew and approved young Eldred's

spirit of enterprise. His own had lured him in a like direction thirteen years before. But much valuable work still remained to be done, work for which this hot-headed, lion-hearted nephew of his seemed supremely well equipped.

So it had come about that in the foregoing summer Eldred had proffered his services for exploring and surveying the countries west of the Indus, in a formal application endorsed by a sincere tribute from his Commandant. "If my estimate of his character, after long acquaintance, be not incorrect," wrote Captain Ward, "I should say he is peculiarly fitted for the employment he covets by a natural and ardent desire for travelling, combined with much patience and temper in the endurance of many and severe privations." And a man had need of patience in those leisurely days when a letter posted in July did not receive Government sanction till October, and when the addition of a few needful instruments involved another three months' delay. But there had been much to do and think of during the hours off duty, which were few: Pushtoo and Persian to be studied; routes to be discussed and mapped out with the uncle who loved him as a father, and whose own book published ten years earlier had fired his zeal to go and do likewise whenever opportunity offered.

And now, behold, the dream translated into reality; the subaltern into an explorer, armed, secretly, with books and instruments for so much of military surveying as could be achieved without risk of detection. There, at his feet, lay Kabul in her spring *sári*. Four or five weeks should see him at Herāt; and once there—all Asia lay before him. Could heart of man ask more? The call of the Road, voiceless yet insistent, the glory of going

on, that works like madness in the blood, was strong upon him. From boyhood onward he had felt himself brother in spirit to the restless army of pioneers, the makers of Greater Britain. For him, as for them, the skyline was at once a challenge and a lure: a "voice as bad as conscience" whispering: I am here. Come and find me. And now, after ten years of zealous, uneventful service in Artillery and Irregular Horse, Fate had given him his chance.

What he would make of it remained to be seen. But there was that in the mien of the bearded Gunner subaltern which augured well for any project of his undertaking. The blue eyes and warm brown of the beard—temporarily darkened with colour juice—belonged to a soldierly temper; high-spirited, passionate; a great fighter in the making. Even at six-and-twenty the spirit that could so dare and so endure brooded in the grave tenderness of the eyes. The discerning could read promise of it in the resolute under lip; in the brow's commanding nobility and breadth, half hidden though it was beneath the folds of his turban. The undiscerning saw him only as a sturdy-looking subaltern, too shy and reserved for carpet uses, and far less at home between four walls than in camp or jungle—a man one would more readily appeal to at a crisis than invite to dinner. And assuredly the first would have been more to his taste. In the past two months he had neither sat at a dinner table, nor used a fork, nor spoken with one of his own race. But he was not the man to quarrel with trifling drawbacks, and these things were in the bond.

Following the way of the river, he and his party entered Kabul through the south gate, a mere narrowing of rocks to a defile, whereby the river enters also and flows through the length of the city, which still lay some way

ahead. Another mile of gardens, and lo! the *Char Chutta*, at that time still a remarkable remnant of Ali Merdan Khan's grand bazaar. The four covered streets, each one hundred and fifty feet long, were built of unburnt brick and roughly frescoed in red, purple and green, their carven shop-fronts stacked with wonders of embroidery and jewellery, guns and chain armour, rugs and furs; earthen jars for water drinkers, and for tea-drinkers great pots of iron, in which the Afghan delights to stew it with salt and ghee. The space between was thronged, as of custom, with men from all parts of Asia, with horses, dogs, camels and strayed fowls. For Afghans, like the French, have their own cheerful, casual life of the street. Iced drinks were tossed off, *kabobs* prepared and eaten, there in the midst of the noisy stream of life that flows through every great bazaar in Asia.

It had been settled that Pottinger should wait at the *serái* while the Syud went on to see the Amir and arrange for a suitable lodging. He was not gone long; and in his absence the others amused themselves bargaining and drinking *faloda*—a delectable wheat jelly mixed with sherbet and snow. Presently he brought word that any British officer would be welcome in the house of Nawab Jubbur Khan, brother of the Amir. One traveller was there already: reputed French. So to the house of Jubbur Khan they went; down a mean and dirty lane, through a great gate into a courtyard gay with flowers and enclosed by a two-storied building of the most primitive pattern. Not a pane of glass or a fireplace had ever been seen in Kabul; but such comforts as the house afforded were very much at Pottinger's service, and welcome enough after the rough and tumble of the road.

In the rooms that were to be his he was greeted by the "French officer," who turned out to be Harlan, the

clever, unscrupulous American adventurer, formerly physician to the Lion of Lahore, and now in the employ of Dōst Mahomed Khan. To Pottinger's surprise, he wore English clothes, and—still more amazing—gave him an English dinner, such as he had not eaten since leaving Kutch. Better than all were the cigars that followed and the joy of speaking in his own tongue. Like most egoists, Harlan was a ready talker: and the tale of his crazy adventures lost nothing in the telling.

It was all sufficiently new and amusing to Pottinger, who could no more have dilated upon his own doings for two hours at a stretch than have bidden the sun stand still. When it was over he slept in luxury upon a string "charpoy" for the first time in seventy-six days.

And Kabul's ruler slept also in the fullness of power, untroubled by foreknowledge that the days were at hand when the greater nation to which he looked confidently for help should, in terrible fashion, accept his figurative invitation to consider himself and his country as its own. Yet were the hidden makers of drama already at work; the theatre set; the prologue prepared; and with the entrance of Eldred Pottinger into Kabul, the first actor had appeared upon the scene.

II

For the better part of three months Eldred Pottinger stayed in the house of Nawab Jubbur Khan, an Afghan of greater foresight, depth and moderation than any of the Barakzai brothers—not excepting the Amir.

Owing to a break in Pottinger's journal the reasons for this long delay are not quite clear. No doubt May was too early for crossing the Hazara highlands; and there was need—as Mohun Shah had said—for closer study of the language, life and customs of the Afghans, to say nothing of the religion he must now assume; a form of mockery so distasteful to him that he had kept clear of it hitherto. Meantime, though delay might be irksome, it gave him leisure to make friends with his new comrades of the road; to elaborate maps and fill in later items of the route. Letters also, long and detailed, must be written to the uncle whose devotion he returned with interest; to younger brothers in Bombay and Bengal; and to Mount Pottinger, County Down, the happy-go-lucky Irish home whence he had set out ten years earlier with intent to conquer the world! The despatching of these was a costly and uncertain business; the *Kasid*[1] demanding his six or eight rupees in advance, and the letters' ultimate fate hanging upon the Oriental's misty sense of time and responsibility. This had been brought home to him by an incident on the upward march through Sindh; when one of his Afghan companions—a non-commissioned officer

[1] Runner.

returning home on leave—had received at the hands of a clansman a travelled scrap of paper, which had been pursuing him at random for over two years.

But, risk or no, letters must be despatched on the bare chance that some day they would arrive somewhere: and at times the big, lone heart of the man shrank, in prospect, from the spells of desolation ahead, when month might follow month without bringing him a word from friends in India or from those he loved at home. Himself an only child, left motherless at two years old, his father's second wife had taken him into her heart as one of her own. The step-relation at Mount Pottinger had nothing about it that was not beautiful. No distinctions were recognized there. Indeed, Mrs. Pottinger appears to have loved none among her own eight children more tenderly than the strong, high-spirited, self-forgetful boy who, from first to last, was as true a son to her as mother ever had.

Glimpses of those early days, though few and meagre, aptly foreshadow the man. Mrs. Pottinger found the lovable four-year-old Eldred a source of comfort, never to be forgotten, during her husband's long absences in his yacht; an extravagance that, like many others, had to be forgone when children multiplied and ill-advised speculations failed one after the other, till the impoverished landowner was driven to leave Mount Pottinger for a house more in keeping with his straitened means. These, by now, consisted mainly of the rentals from a certain Kilmore estate, left to him by his first wife in trust for her son; and, from all accounts, as woefully ill-managed as the main of his affairs.

Family letters and comments leave an impression that Eldred Pottinger owed little either to the influence or character of a father, as lively and talented as he was

extravagant and irresponsible; unless, indeed, on the principle that "out of example is wrought not merely the impulse to imitate, but often a passionate realization of the advantage of another way." Or it may be that the spirit of his unknown mother lived again in her son; seeing that his self-denial, tenderness and forbearance toward the crowd of small brothers and sisters appears to have dated from nursery days. Even then it was found that he could keep a secret better than most grown people; and if the interests of others were concerned, wild horses would not draw it from him.

Very early, too, it was evident that, with all the boy's aptitude for book knowledge, the inmost desire of his heart was towards foreign travel and military adventure.

At Addiscombe the fact that he "took a good place in his class" went for little. It was the courage, uprightness and manly bearing of the fourteen-year-old cadet that gained the admiration of his fellows. One only besetting fault gave him any lasting trouble: a temper quick and passionate as that of Nicholson or the Lawrences themselves; and no less sturdily combated, till the years brought some measure of control. Family tradition has it that while at Addiscombe he invented some new form of shell and daringly exploded it, to the dismay of the authorities and the peril of those who shared the fun. Invention or mere mischief, there was good promise in either. But the significance of the incident lies deeper. Though others were implicated, Gentleman-Cadet Pottinger took on himself all responsibility for the breach of college rules, and tried to bear all the punishment. It went near to cost him his commission, yet nothing would induce him to reveal the names of his friends.

And so on to India as a subaltern of artillery, which

arm of the service has for a hundred years kept the name of Pottinger upon its rolls. Here the challenge of the horizon and an eager longing for active employment speedily drew him northward, not without good results, as has been seen.

Three brothers and a sister had followed him to India; while he himself—his tramp royal achieved—looked forward keenly to the deliberate homeward voyage, and glad reunion with the mother he had parted from as a boy of sixteen. But that lay two years ahead, at the most hopeful computation. What would those years bring forth?

His own serious nature and much talk with his uncle had given him a wider understanding of matters political than the soldier of six-and-twenty is apt to possess. He knew that Colonel Pottinger—least fanciful of men—anticipated frontier complications at no distant date; that his keen penetration detected the hidden element of danger in Lord Auckland's pacific scheme for opening the river Indus to British enterprise and encouraging our commerce with Afghanistan. It is a truism of imperial history that commerce spells politics, and politics war, be the olive branch never so assiduously waved: and in this case the friendly passages between Viceroy and Amir were genuine enough.

Dōst Mahomed Khan, Chief of Kabul and of the strong tribe of Barakzai, had greeted the new Governor after the fashion of his kind: "The field of my hopes, which had before been chilled by the cold blast of wintry times, has, by the happy tidings of your lordship's arrival, become the envy of the Garden of Paradise. . . . Communicate to me whatever may suggest itself to your wisdom for the settlement of the affairs of this country, that it may serve as a rule for my guidance. . . . I

hope your lordship will consider me and my country as your own."

Lord Auckland had sent answer, also after his kind, assuring the Amir of his wish to see the Afghans "a flourishing and united nation." But of personal advice no word, beyond the mild protest: "My friend, you are aware that it is not the practice of the British Government to interfere with the affairs of other independent States." Words writ in all good faith, if ever words were. War with Afghanistan was the last thing the new Governor dreamed of or desired. Timid, cautious and well-meaning, his five years of office seemed to him a sublime opportunity for dispensing justice and happiness to the people under his charge. But the curse of the unstable was upon him; and, upon India, a spirit of unrest that augured ill for visions of the vine and fig-tree order. The whole political atmosphere was a-flutter with portents not lightly to be disregarded; and of these the most disturbing came from the far north-west—eternal storm-quarter of India's horizon. Sir John McNeill, British minister in Teheran, wrote anxiously of á threatened Russo-Persian advance on Herāt—"the Gate of India." In which event, said scaremongers, the city must fall, and the whole fertile valley become a base for further advance on Afghanistan and India.

Be this as it might—Russian gold and Russian officers in Persia's army were facts not to be blinked. But the whole affair seemed very misty, very remote. Calcutta considered it officially, with a detached interest, untroubled by prevision of tragedy to come: while in England McNeill's rousing pamphlet on Russia's progress in the East set a score of pens and tongues running upon the subject in all its bearings, possible and impossible. The shadow of Napoleon's eagles gave place to the

shadow of the Bear. The "Russian bogey" was born. Then, as now, there were many minds upon the matter; but on two points sceptic and fanatic were in unison: the need of knowledge more intimate concerning Central Asian geography, and of an Afghan alliance more firmly knit. It was in these days that Lord Auckland bethought him of that peaceful "commercial mission" to Kabul—the prologue of a drama that should teach him terrible things. It was in these days also—the summer of '36—that Eldred Pottinger's cherished plan had taken definite shape. But with the ill-starred Kabul mission he had no concern—as yet.

The Governor-General's choice of an agent was a natural one enough. Captain Alexander Burnes, Political Assistant at Kutch, was already a traveller of note and a personal friend of the Amir. A man of brains, resource and restless ambition, he was of those in whom desire outstrips discretion, and prejudice judgment—conditions fatal to political work of the first order. But the mission was commercial—in name at least; and Burnes was the last authority on trans-Indus countries. He had published a book, something of an event in those days. He had been flattered by London hostesses, and even bidden to Windsor; heady diet for a young man of volatile temper, with a fine natural conceit of himself and a breezy disregard for ideas other than his own. To Colonel Pottinger—a political officer of rare skill and judgment—his brilliant assistant had proved a thorn in the flesh. But for the older man's astonishing forbearance the other's flagrant official liberties might well have recoiled upon his own head; and as it was, the Government orders of November 1836 can hardly have been more welcome to Burnes than to his long-suffering chief. Before the month was at an end the former had started

for Kabul *via* Sindh. And in February '37 Eldred Pottinger set out for the same destination *via* Beloochistan.

At the moment there appeared small kinship between the two events; nor did either expedition seem charged with historic significance. Yet that double journey northward was as the tuning up of instruments in a theatre that had all Afghanistan for stage, and for auditorium the major nations of earth. For the two men also, in that spring of 1837, the hour of destiny had struck, though they "heard not the bell——"

III

THROUGHOUT the weeks that followed his departure from Kutch, Eldred Pottinger experienced to the full the delights and drawbacks of pioneer travel dear to the heart of five-and-twenty, rich in hazard and adventure as it was. Mounted on a camel, and roughly disguised as a Brahui from the Belooch border country, he rode hopefully forth upon that February morning; his companions, three non-commissioned native officers, all, like himself, on special leave. They travelled lightly, without tents, trusting to clear skies or wayside shrines for the night's rest. Their road lay across the salt deserts of Sindh and the Beloochistan passes; on through Quetta to Kandahar and Kabul; and thence on again, so far as might be, into the heart of untravelled Asia.

At the outset Pottinger's disguise was of the thinnest. He had not so much as darkened his skin or dyed his beard. But it soon transpired that there was need of precaution more stringent; for a white face was still dreaded by the men of Sindh, jealous for their country's integrity, and mindful of warnings spoken by a Hindu merchant in the days when John Company rose to power on the ruins of Mahratta thrones.

"This tribe," said he, "never begin as friends without ending as enemies and seizing the country which they entered with the most amicable professions." The shrewd one passed away, but men remembered his words; and when Burnes openly explored the Indus in 1830, a holy man on the bank flung up his hands in dismay,

crying: "Sindh is now gone! The English have seen the river, that is the road to its conquest."

Gone indeed! Already Sikh and British rulers coveted command of that king among rivers; already the last struggle for independence was at hand. For after Burnes came Eldred Pottinger, who, at the little frontier town of Wanga, narrowly escaped detection and frustration of his heart's desire. In spite of precautions the venturesome four found themselves challenged for passports they had never troubled to procure. Explanations proved futile; their guns were seized, their saddle-bags examined, and only by skilful distribution of Pottinger's tell-tale belongings about their own persons did they succeed in disarming suspicion and recovering the guns. Better still, on the plea of foraging for their camels they won leave to sleep without the gates. Here they set up a rough encampment, with sacks and camel saddles, under the lee of a wall, and slept soundly in defiance of wind and rain.

But early, very early, before the day-star had melted in the fire of dawn, Pottinger had arisen and shaken his three comrades wide awake. In the chill grey light, saddle-bags were packed and camels hurriedly loaded; and by the time the sun looked over the rim of the desert, Wanga lay miles behind—a blur in the far-off haze that merged blue and brown in one.

By the first big patch of jungle they turned aside among the trees to smoke and re-load at leisure. Abdullah and Edul Khan dismounted first. The latter had caught the nose-rein of Pottinger's mount and adjured the Son of Kings to kneel, when lo! a snarl, such as only a camel could perpetrate, and a yell of anguish from Abdullah, whose beast had him by the shoulder and was shaking him viciously, as a dog shakes a rat.

In a flash all was confusion and a great shouting. Edul Khan flew to the rescue, brandishing his hookah bottom, which he broke over the brute's head. Pottinger's camel sprang up like a bent twig released, while Allah Dad Khan—whose beast was on its fore-knees—rolled bodily off, and, with the end of his matchlock barrel, tilted valiantly at the enemy's eye. It was all a matter of seconds; breathless, vociferous seconds.

Pottinger, freed from his cloak, was in the act of leaping from the saddle when Abdullah—inspired by terror—turned sharply round and fixed his teeth in the flesh of his tormentor's nose. That clinched matters. With a sound between a snarl and a groan the enemy released his hold, and, thanks to the thickness of cloak and poshteen,[1] the Afghan's skin was not broken; whereat he nodded in grave satisfaction.

"By Allah's will and the power of mine own jaw," said he, "I have left a finer mark on that devil's spawn than he hath left on me."

"*Wah-illah*—a bold man of his teeth!" Edul Khan applauded, with satiric gusto. "But who payeth for my new hookah bottom?"

He brandished the corpse under the muzzled one's contemptuous nose; and the incident ended in a shout of laughter, that broke down barriers of colour and creed as only laughter can.

But real friendliness with companions so ignorant, so fanatical and ill-tempered was no easy matter for an Englishman of good breeding. Their moral obtuseness and unclean habits repelled him; and their incredible stupidity put a severe strain upon a temper he had hoped to tame by the hard living and lean fare of the jungle. Then there were those minor miseries that tyrannize by

[1] Sheep-skin coat.

sheer recurrence—greasy, ill-cooked meals, brick-dust tea for stimulant; the hookah in place of pipe and cheroots. For Eldred Pottinger was no fancy-dress explorer. He had made no provision for the lusts of the flesh. As his comrades fared, so he must fare—or go without; and in the first few weeks he more often went without. Only with the hookah he persevered, in the vain hope that habit might breed enjoyment. Life without tobacco in some form seemed unthinkable; and he had known many an old Company's officer who preferred his hookah to his pipe after mess. He made a fair fight for it. But the hookah triumphed; leaving him to endure, as best he might, the prospect of days unsolaced and evenings unblest.

In the meantime his fair skin, book learning and unobtrusive asceticism conspired to earn him a reputation for saintliness; and his companions, keenly alive to the value of holiness as a practical asset, congratulated themselves on the peculiarities of the Sahib. He himself guessed nothing till the guide—engaged to pilot them across the trans-Indus country—prostrated himself before the supposed Syud and saluted his foot, covering Pottinger with confusion and causing the Afghans to smile discreetly in their beards.

This was on the fourth morning of March; and right before them lay the Indus, raging under the lash of a gale from the north. Here they found a crowd of fellow-wanderers patiently awaiting their chance to cross; fragments of earth, no more able to resist the eternal law of motion than desert-dust under foot or star-dust in the ultimate beyond; whole families migrating or returning, their worldly goods rolled in red cotton quilts or knotted in blue bundles quaintly protuberant; herdsmen shepherding distraught cattle; merchants with their bales; and in

the midst of them one lonely, purposeful British officer, his will driving him toward one goal, his destiny toward another; no uncommon event among the children of men.

Four barges heaved and fell, straining at their ropes, while Pottinger and his comrades manœuvred and persuaded their rebellious camels on board. The crossing that followed was dangerous work and bitter cold in the teeth of a gale that soon brought rain. To crown all, they grounded two hundred yards from the shore, to which they must wade through knee-deep mud and water, while darkness rolled up out of the east like a banner unfurled.

Wet, cold and hungry as they were, camels must be loaded and a night's lodging found. The dusk ahead showed no friendly glimmer, and the guide—having secured two rupees in advance—disclaimed all knowledge of the road with the engaging modesty of his kind. So they went forward at random behind a party who had crossed with them, the modest hireling for form's sake leading the way.

Before long all were at a standstill. Women fell to whimpering, men to swearing; and Allah Dad Khan, past-master of Asiatic invective, consigned the misbegotten offspring of a pig to *Jehannum*, where his noseless mother and sisters were, without doubt, causing blood feuds among the sons of perdition. The guide, sure of his two rupees, retaliated in kind; and Pottinger saw that unless he asserted himself the fluent interchange of compliments might go on till dawn. The plight of the women and children afflicted his chivalrous soul; and conquering his reluctance to attract attention, he silenced the combatants with the scathing comment that as none of them seemed able to find a way, he, a stranger, would do what he could; let those follow who

chose. Quiet words, quietly spoken; but the note of decision had its effect. The wettest and weariest took heart of grace, little dreaming that the stranger of the deep-toned voice and reputed holiness was but a Feringhi subaltern exercising his racial instinct for leadership and resource.

In due time they reached a canal declared unsafe for crossing except by established fords. There were lights opposite, and the sound of men's voices; and with one accord they shouted to those favoured ones for help. The favoured ones, being dry and warm, cared nothing for their plight; and the guide, for very shame, floundered into unknown depths, praying that Allah might direct his going in the way.

But Allah was not so minded; and at the third step forward the man dropped shrieking into a hole. There was a general halt and a shout of dismay. Pottinger hauled him, dripping and spluttering, to the surface.

"It is plain thou knowest not the ford," said he. "I will find it for myself. Let the rest come on."

But neither persuasion nor example would induce them to stir; and Eldred Pottinger, heartily sick of their stupidity, went on alone. Nor did one man among them follow, till a shout assured them he had hit on the ford; and five minutes later they were all scrambling pell-mell up the farther bank. Here their journey ended in a rough open shed, which Pottinger and his friends had leave to share with six other men, one woman, three children and two bullocks. A log fire dried the clothes upon their backs while they ate their fill of coarse bread washed down with butter-milk, and, according to young Eldred's journal, "finished the evening tolerably well."

Three days later brought them to the gate of Shikarpore; and after harassing search they cast anchor in a

lone hovel, where Pottinger, wrapped in his cloak, burned and shivered for near a week, in defiance of quinine. Then came respite and prostration, the which he disregarded, peremptorily demanding colour-juices and clothes in which he might venture abroad. They brought him a shirt and wide trousers of coarse white cloth, a *lungi* for kummerbund, another for turban, and rough laced boots. They brought news also that the Afghan merchants had combined to form a *kafila*,[1] starting in a few days; and the Sahib must see that it would be well to travel thus through the wilds of a country where men live not by patient tilling of the soil, but by prowess of matchlock and sword. Yes, the Sahib saw; though for himself he would sooner have marched unhampered and taken his chance.

Followed a week of complications and delays maddening to one of British temper; then, in the cool half-light before dawn, they started—a motley assortment of merchants, travellers and a host of poor families, glad to return home in stalwart company.

Pottinger endured the new departure with his wonted stoicism. But the delays and deviations of his soldier friends were as nothing to the vagaries of this noisy Afghan crowd that straggled and loitered through thirty miles of unhealthy jungle; halting on the least provocation; courting, in pure stupidity, the very dangers it most desired to avoid. Happily for all, the Belooch marauders were engaged elsewhere; and after two days of marching—interleaved with three of lounging by the way—the forty-mile stretch of desert lay before them, grey and lifeless as the face of a corpse. No billows here, no ripples of wind-blown sand as in Bikaneer and Rajputana. But only mile upon mile of pathless waste;

[1] Caravan.

level as a lake, bare as the blue above, save for the faint line of route marked out by the feet of wayfarers and the bones of those whose kismet had been evil.

Two leisurely night marches, under a moon of unearthly brilliance, brought them to the oasis—a fort, a couple of wells, a clump of trees; and here the prospect of further delay brought Pottinger's endurance to an end.

Boldly uprising in the far north-west, a misty blue vision of mountains flung him the old irresistible challenge; and shaking off the lethargy of fever, he persuaded a small party of Afghans, impatient as himself, to push on that very night towards Bagh, where the plains of Upper Sindh merge into the foothills of the Brahooick range.

They marched from dusk to dawn, covering thirty-six miles, and breakfasting among the awakening fields and gardens of Bāgh. A brief rest here, imperative as it was welcome; for intermittent fever was sapping Pottinger's strength. Less welcome by far was the discovery that word had gone before him of a Sahib travelling up from Sindh to Kandahar. How the news had got abroad he could not conceive; so secret had been his preparations, so great his anxiety to avoid any *contre-temps* of the kind. But the thing being done, he decided to avoid Kandahar and take the more direct route to Kabul across the Toba Pass, still wondering vexedly whose indiscretion he had to thank for an annoyance that might prove serious at a later stage of his journey. Enlightenment came sooner than he looked for.

Seventeen miles from Bāgh they fell in with the encampment of Allah Dad's clan, faring north-west like the rest of the world at this season of almond blossom and young corn. The whole moving village was compact of primitive black blanket tents, still familiar to officers

on the north-west frontier; and here the chief made them welcome, after his kind, with salutations and embraces, and such a royal meal as they had not eaten for days, ceremoniously set out upon a couple of coarse towels mottled with the stains of years. Thereafter followed *kalvans* [1] for smokers; drums, music, dancing and an undercurrent of talk.

In the course of this last it transpired that the chief's son had visited Kutch in November and there fell in with Burnes, who told him that the Duffadar would shortly be coming up-country with a Sahib to Kandahar; to all of which Pottinger listened outwardly unconcerned, inwardly fuming. Such flagrant carelessness, in the face of his clearly expressed wish that the whole matter should be kept secret, puzzled and annoyed beyond measure this most inward of Irishmen, noted from boyhood for his power to keep a still tongue in his head, above all where the interests of others were concerned. What possible motive Burnes could have had in multiplying a fellow-explorer's difficulties and dangers it was hard to conceive; jealousy, perhaps, not uncommon between "two of a trade"; or a grudge against the uncle visited on the nephew; or again, most probably, mere constitutional leakiness, from which the elder man had already suffered much, and was fated to suffer more before the end of the chapter.

Pottinger allowed himself two nights' rest with the friendly Sirdar; and at daylight on March the 28th set out to cross the passes into the valley of Pishin, his party swelled by the chief's son, Juma Khan, and a couple of matchlockmen for guides.

Here, among the stony-hearted Afghan hills, hardships of a new order awaited him: days of toiling up rocky

[1] Hookahs.

paths, slipping and stumbling among the pebbles and boulders of torrent-beds; days of blinding glare, of incessant feud between sun and wind; nights when the last triumphed so mightily that no fire could live in the open; and that meant going empty to rest—such rest as a man may hope for wrapped in a poshteen and blanket on a wind-whipped hill-top of Afghanistan. And through it all Eldred Pottinger must contrive to steer a mildly remonstrant camel, whose every leg seemed animated with a perverse will of its own; to make notes and rough sketches of the route, and to imbibe as much information as could be gained without asking direct questions—that would belie his Asiatic dress.

On the last day of March they fought their way across the Pass in the teeth of a hurricane, and at nightfall dropped down where they stood, too numbed and footsore to bestir themselves, though the reward were fire and food. Four days and nights the gale raced and roared, buffeting them without mercy; so that even afoot the stoutest went in danger of being blown from the path. The fourth night found them on the plain of Mastung, in a traveller's hut of the darkest and dirtiest, but at least a shelter from the rain that fell in torrents with the passing of the gale.

Day broke blue and clear, and the high-road to Khelāt promised miles of smooth going for the camel people, whose feet had been cruelly cut in crossing the hills. Pottinger's own feet were blistered; but in pity to the laden beasts he insisted on walking the greater part of each march, and made his men follow suit, to their obvious surprise and disgust. Edul Khan—whose temper had been out of gear for many days—sulked openly, and treated Pottinger with a covert impertinence hard to be endured. For a while prudence curbed the Englishman's

temper. But seeing that silence seemed rather to breed rancour, he spoke in private to the Duffadar and Juma Khan. The former shook his head and tugged ruefully at his beard.

"Hazūr, it is an ill business. The Captain Sahib thought highly of the man; so I feared to speak of his evil nature lest it be esteemed backbiting. But his Jemadar bade me keep close watch over him lest harm befall."

Here was an unlooked-for trouble worse than the horse-play of the elements; and Pottinger swore under his breath.

"In God's name, man, why did you not speak to me? I would never have taken him had I known."

Allah Dad folded his hands in mute apology. "For that very reason, Hazūr, the door of my lips was locked. Had he ever suspected that through word of mine service was lost to him, I might have eaten bread one week—two weeks—no more."

He stated the fact quite simply. For him it was obvious as the course of a dropt stone; and in spite of hot vexation Pottinger smiled.

"Not a pleasant prospect, Allah Dad! But the present one's damned unpleasant for me. What are the fellow's grievances? Dost know?"

"He was wroth at leaving the *Kafila*, and also at the Sahib's order concerning the camels. He hath sworn to buy a *tattoo* [1] as Mastung and ride whenever it pleaseth him."

"*Bismillah!* It is time he should know who is master. Bring his Khanship to me."

"Hazūr, have a care. He is an ill man to cross."

"For that cause I have already ignored his ill-humour too long. Bring him at once. *Hukum hai.*" [2]

[1] Pony. [2] It is an order.

Magic words that even Edul Khan dared not disregard, though undoubtedly he looked "an ill man to cross" as he stood before his subaltern scowling at vacancy, sullen defiance in every line of him. The snarl with which he answered the first plain question as to the cause of his behaviour had the effect of flint striking flint; but weeks of hard-won self-control stood Pottinger in good stead.

"It seems thou art not the strong man Captain Ward Sahib took thee for," he said sternly, but without heat. "A few marches afoot and thou canst no farther. What is this I hear of buying a tattoo at Mastung?"

"True talk. I choose not to walk because fools regard camels' feet before their own. After Mastung—I ride."

"Not with my leave."

"Then without it!" Edul Khan flashed out fiercely. "I am in mine own country."

"But still in Government service, and under my orders."

"Nevertheless—I choose to ride."

Defiance smouldered in the man's black eyes, and the insolent swagger of his tone goaded Pottinger to fury.

"Ride to Jehannum and broil there!" he flung out fiercely. "I keep not a *loocha*[1] and *badzat*[2] in my employ. If you disobey my orders we travel by different roads."

"Better for both, belike!" sneered the Afghan, his hand at his belt. "Since leaving Kutch my stomach hath been surfeited with hardships and ill feeding. I will endure no more. I said when taking this service that my bread was gone."

He swung round and strode wrathfully out of the hovel where they talked. But Pottinger, his flash of anger past, called him back.

[1] Loafer. [2] Bad character.

"It is the devil in thine own heart that hath wrought this trouble, Edul Khan," he said quietly. "I take away no man's bread. Thou camest of thine own will, and being dissatisfied, art free to return."

"Return—*Wah!* to the child's play of mock warfare and shooting without bloodshed! Matchlocks be man-eaters in mine own land, where be no police-*log*—praise be to Allah—making outcry over a corpse or two. Nay, I go not back."

But Pottinger, feeling that an open breach were impolitic in the circumstances, preserved his more placable tone.

"If that be so," he answered, "and if thy foolishness hath left thee, I am willing that thou should'st march with us to-morrow."

"*Kya!*"[1] the man snapped like a vicious dog, and, receiving no answer, flung up his head. "I have been told to take mine own road, and by the beard of the Prophet I take none other."

Thereat Juma Khan and the Duffadar fell upon him with arguments, persuasion, threats, in fluent colloquial Pushtoo. But the outcome was nil. Edul Khan's arrogance and daring increased rather; so that Pottinger had much ado to keep his fists to himself. Once, indeed, when the Afghan flung out a contemptuous "*Wah!* That Feringhi fellow is no Lat-sahib that I should eat dirt to win his favour," Pottinger's hand went involuntarily to his belt. But the pistols that should have been there were rolled up safely in his bedding, or Edul Khan might have proved his own boast that in his country a corpse more or less was of no account. The arrested impulse cooled Pottinger's hot blood, and calling his champions to order, he dismissed the offender without a word.

[1] What.

Left to themselves, the three took counsel in low tones. The Asiatics, in their zeal, had made matters worse than ever; and by way of reparation Juma Khan volunteered to detain the rebel as long as need be at Mastung. A tempting offer, but Eldred Pottinger was not the man to shift his own risk onto another pair of shoulders.

Then the chief's son, secretly relieved, advanced a guileless proposition—Afghan to the core. It would be a simple matter for the Sahib to feign forgiveness, and pacify the son of Satan by asking it in return; then, when all was safely over, to punish him as he deserved. But the Sahib, being troubled with a familiar spirit unknown to his comrades, found the proposal less simple than it seemed.

"It is not the *dastúr* of my country," said he, "to promise one thing and perform another. The word of an Englishman is sacred as the name of God; and I could not break mine even to save my life. I see but one way out of the dilemma. We must hire some reliable men who will escort him to Bhooj, where they will receive payment from Captain Ward Sahib. If he refuse to go he is a deserter, and I shoot him on the spot. This thou canst tell him from me, Allah Dad; and let him decide one way or the other."

"It is manfully spoken, Sahib," they applauded; and left him alone with his thoughts.

That night, before sleeping, he recorded the incident in his journal, adding, by way of comment: "I do not ever remember to have had to swallow so bitter a pill as this was to-night. I fully perceive if I choose to beg the scoundrel to accompany us that he would do so. But it would only open the door to constant repetitions of such conduct; and as I am, thank God, not totally friendless even here, I shall not show such disrespect to

myself. Juma Khan has offered to detain him here; but this is entailing too much upon him and his tribe, and may get them into trouble. Besides, I have told Edul Khan too much of my plans to let him go loose as an enemy. So I see no resource, if he still continues obstinate, but the pistol."

IV

HAPPILY for Eldred Pottinger he was spared the hateful necessity of shooting a fellow man at sight. In the morning Allah Dad brought word that the devil had gone out of Edul Khan; but to start that day would be impossible, since the Sahib's black camel had gone dead lame.

The calamity proved a happy one. Pottinger was not sorry for a chance to rest and improve his Pushtu; and it occurred to him that a passing penitence might serve as pretext to rid himself of Edul Khan without risk or friction. Since marching disagreed with him he should have leave to spend a month among his own people, with strict injunctions to rejoin their party at Kandahar, where Pottinger intended that he should find instead—no party, but an order for his return to Bhuj! A mild deception not to be cavilled at, in the circumstances; since a fresh outbreak at a more critical juncture might wreck his plans for good. The proposal was broached; and it transpired that Edul Khan himself had been about to suggest some such compromise. So much the better for Pottinger, whose motive would not be suspected until he was well out of harm's way.

And so an end of Edul Khan.

The middle of April found them in the valley of Pishin, where spring already sat enthroned and garlanded: with white and pink fruit blossoms for coronal, the shimmering poplar for sceptre, and for footstool, young corn lands embroidered with the wild iris and tulip of the hills. A breath from the faint snow-line tempered the

sun's ardour at noon; but at dusk men sat round log fires, stirring the ashes with cold bare toes. It was round just such a fire, in the travellers' room of an underground mosque, that Eldred Pottinger fell in with his friend Mohun Shah. The Syud, in spite of denial, had known him for an Englishman, and thereupon rained protestations of devotion to himself and all of his race. A tent and ponies were placed at Pottinger's disposal, and, by way of credential, a Government letter, acknowledging services rendered to Arthur Conolly, was proudly displayed.

"Your honour is one of the same *jāt*, that is easily seen," the good man concluded, crowning his new-found Sahib with the highest eulogium in his vocabulary. "Pity that all the English in Hind are not of such noble countenance, treating with respect men of other creeds and other complexions. For harm is wrought often to English prestige among the followers of God and his Prophet through certain Sahibs, young and foolish, possibly of low caste, who think to show themselves *Bahādur* by insulting and scornful speech to men of dark skin. There was one such in Bengal, at whose hands I suffered much. Your honour may have heard?"

Yes, Pottinger had heard, and had not greatly heeded, though he had seen the young official's conduct severely censured in the papers. Considering the matter now, with enlightened mind, he pressed Mohun Shah to speak of it from the Asiatic point of view, and the talk that followed set him thinking to some purpose.

"I am ashamed," he wrote in his journal with the frank simplicity that was his, "when I remember how often I have been actor or partner in such scenes of insolence. I begin to see that our customs regarding the natives are very erroneous, and the sooner they are altered

the better. I also see that they notice our conduct in this respect."

This, from a subaltern in '37—and even to-day there be men in India who have not yet grasped the fact that there individual character and conduct count for more, perhaps, than anywhere else on earth. Not in regard to themselves alone; but in regard to the nation they are privileged to represent. That Eldred Pottinger recognized this early, and acted on the recognition, is a distinction he shares with some of the greatest names in our Anglo-Indian story.

For a week he lingered in the sun-filled valley of Pishin, sketching maps and wrestling with Pushtu, in defiance of the fever-fiend that clave to him, with the tenacity of the undesired, through all his Afghan service. Then the zeal of the Syud culminated in a determination to escort his friend in person through the dangerous hill country of the Kākur and Ghilzai tribes; and on April 22 the Bukhtiari merchant, who had entered the valley hungry and footsore, rode forth in state—his safe conduct to Kabul practically assured.

And now—an honoured guest of the Nawab Jubbur Khan—the young explorer, embryo no longer, awaited the acceptable moment to be gone; while May slipped past with its ecstasy of colour; its Friday pleasurings; its evenings of alluring idleness in gardens choral with love-songs of nightingale and thrush. For Friday is the Mahomedan Sunday, and upon that day the royal apple orchard was transformed into a fair. Thither from palace and city alike followers of the Prophet flocked out, in hundreds, to take their fill of things more excellent than cheating and throat-cutting, lust and intrigue. Women were there also, seeing, unseen; strolling and

gossiping with their men folk; looking for all the world like corpses set up on end, in their latticed *boorkhas* and loose leggings, brilliantly gartered at the knee. At such gatherings the men of Afghanistan are seen to good advantage; and Pottinger, like all Englishmen, was strongly attracted at the outset by their courage, vigour and independence, a certain virility of fibre common to mountain-bred folk. It needed closer intimacy to reveal the devils within; and such intimacy was vouchsafed to Pottinger during the next few years. Well for his judgment of the race that he should have known at the outset two such notable chiefs as his host and the Barakzai Amir—first of his clan to bear the title and ascend the throne of Afghanistan.

For they were not of the blood royal, these Barakzai Sirdars; though, as king-makers and upholders of kings, Dōst Mahomed's father and eldest brother had wielded supreme power over the conflict-ridden kingdom of Afghanistan, at that time barely a hundred years old.

Founded by Ahmed Shah, upon treasure stolen from the murdered Nādir Shah, the curse of violence and treachery had shadowed the empire from the hour of its birth. For empire it had become by the time Ahmed Shah died; and, dying, bequeathed to his heir a kingdom stretching from the mountains of Tibet to the Sutlej and the Indus; for which legacy that heir did little, beyond enriching it with six-and-thirty children, twenty-three of whom were sons.

Needless to follow in detail the murderous Afghan programme of rivalry, treachery and intrigue that rent the kingdom and speedily reduced the empire to a name. Suffice it that three of the royal brothers, in turn, were supported on the throne by Futteh Khan, the Barakzai Wazir; and, of these, the last was Shah Shujah-ul-Mulk

—the man doomed, by a strange mingling of fate and folly, to be instrumental in one of the blackest chapters of Anglo-Indian history. His deposed elder brother retired, with a son, to Herāt. Thither, before long, came Futteh Khan, alienated by Shah Shujah's ingratitude, and eager to assist in tilting him from the throne.

Thus it came about that, in 1816, Shah Shujah fled to British India, where he settled down intermittently as a royal pensioner; and those early years of his banishment saw the rise of Dōst Mahomed Khan, a ruler of rare talent and power; though compelled, by ill-fortune and the Calcutta Government, to be in turn "the rejected friend, the enforced enemy, the honourable prisoner, vindictive assailant and faithful ally of the British in India." The brutal murder of his brother, in revenge for his own daring seizure of Herāt, gave him his chance, and he took it—as he took all that came his way—with the high-handed violence of his race. But the Barakzai did not profess to conquer for themselves. Futteh Khan had fought for the hands of princes, and Dōst Mahomed, true to the spirit of legitimacy, followed suit, for a time. Then he gave it up in disgust; fought openly for his own hand, and carried all before him.

But not until the death of an elder brother in 1826 did he set himself upon the thorny seat of power; and on that day, like an Eastern Harry V, he abjured for good the notorious excesses of his youth. From a daring, dissolute soldier, ignorant of all save horsemanship and war, he was transformed into a ruler, the strongest and ablest Central Asia had seen since Nadir Shah. In 1837 he was at the height of his power, and had already proven himself a hero of true Afghan stamp and character. Ambitious, grasping, and not over-scrupulous, he was yet—as men of his race go—neither wantonly

treacherous nor cruel. But in the unholy strife of Afghan politics a man must either fight ruthlessly for his own hand or die, and Dōst Mahomed did not intend to die—yet awhile.

For eleven years he had gone from strength to strength, ruling his refractory tribes with rough justice and a rod of steel. Shah Shujah's two attempts to unseat him had failed signally. The man lacked sinews, figurative and financial. The Sikhs gave far more trouble. Like restless waves they beat upon the Amir's rocky coastline, steadily undermining the empire of Ahmed Shah. Peshawur was gone from him; Persia threatened to enforce her ancient claim on Herāt; and even now an army under his favourite son, Mahomed Akbar Khan, was stemming the tide of invasion among the defiles of the Khyber Pass. From all sides came thunder rolls, presaging storm; only to India and the British Government Dōst Mahomed looked hopefully for the sealing of a friendship that would establish and strengthen him upon the throne that was his by right of prowess and his people's good-will. Eagerly he awaited the coming of Burnes, whom in '34 he had treated as a personal friend, and who would assuredly befriend him in turn.

But May slid smilingly into June. The orchards rained summer snowflakes that lay in shrivelling heaps upon the ground. And still the only news from India was of a doubtful victory near Jamrud: no word of "Sekundur" [1] Burnes, who was lingering in the Punjab at the court of Ranjit Singh. And still Eldred Pottinger waited—patiently impatient—till the Kamrān scare had subsided and Persia seemed to have changed her mind about Herāt.

Then, as July drew to an end and the country round

[1] Alexander.

waxed comparatively quiet, he made secret preparation for his venture across the high, rugged valleys of Central Afghanistan, whose chiefs had an ill name for hospitality to strangers. Young and eager as he was, the chance of being first in the field outweighed all accounts of the manifold risks involved. The Syuds, who had agreed to join him, and the few friends who had his confidence, besought him to change his route—in vain. Chary always about discussing his own affairs, he was now more reticent than usual, it having come to his ears that the Amir might object to his plan of visiting Herāt. Not a soul, save those concerned, knew the day and hour of his out-setting. To Allah Dad Khan and Abdulla he confided his instruments and most of his books, bidding them take the longer, safer Kandahar route and join him at Herāt, where he would await their coming. It distressed him that he must leave his friend, the good Nawab, with no word of thanks or farewell; but he intended to write a full explanation of his seeming discourtesy so soon as a hundred miles lay between him and the capital.

Horses and baggage were forwarded one evening to a caravanserai some miles on. Then, upon another evening, he spoke openly of going with Syud Ahmed to visit a defile of the Lōghur river near Kabul, and after dark, unsuspected by any of the Nawab's household, they left the city with its noise of men, its intricate tangle of hatred and good-fellowship, and set their faces toward the eternally irresistible unknown.

V

It was late afternoon. From above the rugged mountain mass that gleamed blue-white against a bluer heaven, the sun drove great spokes of light into the valley, while out of the deeper gullies and ravines broader spokes of shadow stole up to meet them. The soundless battle between dark and light, that reddens the skies as rivers are reddened by the battles of men.

The sun smote strongly on Eldred Pottinger's face as he drew rein on one of the lesser spurs, to scour the savage features of hill and valley with expectant eyes. At last, where all seemed emptiness, he found that which he sought. A patch of dun-coloured excrescences clung, limpet-wise, to a mass of rock already half submerged by the conquering shadows. Pottinger knew these for the fort and village of Yakoob Beg, most inhospitable of Hazara chiefs. Tales of his tyrannies had enlivened them by the way. It was said that his pouches bulged with the blackmail he levied on strangers, and the prices of those more luckless ones whom it suited him to sell as slaves. The Feringhi—never having seen—he hated only a few degrees worse than the Sunnis of his own faith; for among Moslems sect antagonism is hardly less bitter than antagonism of creed.

Not a cheering prospect for Eldred Pottinger: infidel by birth, and, for the moment, Sunni by profession. But his hope was to slip past the village undetected just before dark. Report had located it beyond this particular spur; and Pottinger, more eager than his *kismet*-

drugged comrades, had ridden on ahead to reconnoitre and consider their safest plan of advance.

A glance at the fort, and another at the thread of track, that curled down and up again over the next shoulder of the hill, convinced him that passing undetected with a string of laden beasts would be no easy achievement. Still—the attempt must be made; and beneath his anxiety Pottinger was aware of that nameless stirring of the blood common to all risk-loving men in the hour of danger.

"See, Ahmed," said he, as the Syuds joined him, "the track passeth close under the village walls; and to forsake it were madness. An hour's rest here to let the dusk gather. Then we must take the risk, and trust in God."

So they rested for an hour till the shadows prevailed in the valley; though the sun was not yet gone. Then they took the risk—and trusted in God.

If the watchers were feasting or drowsy all might go well. But Yakoob Beg was not the man to let prey so profitable slip through his fingers. The little cavalcade had been sighted afar off: and even as they thought to pass safely, a door in the wall opened, and they were bidden to enter in the chief's name.

Resistance being futile, they complied; and entering, found their host, with a score of companions, smoking and lolling in a stuffy twilight reeking of hookahs and humanity, and starred with cotton wicks aflare in saucers of oil.

"Remember, Sahib, we be Shiahs," Hussain contrived to whisper in Pottinger's ear; and the Sahib remembered, while devoutly wishing himself a clearer knowledge of all that his apostasy might imply.

Their sonorous greeting, "*Salaam Aleikum*," came

back to them in a broken echo; and the presents etiquette demanded were accepted with affable condescension. Followed a searching catechism from the chief, wherein Syud Hussain was spokesman for his friends. The fairy tale, transforming them into Shiah holy-men, from the hill country beyond Kabul, fell from his lips as naturally as a stream from its source; while Pottinger, in the hope of avoiding attention, took to his beads. But the eye of the "black-hearted cousin" was upon him, and the brain behind it was devising snares.

Of a sudden he nudged the chief. "Professions are easy as throat-cutting," said he. "If these be true Shiahs, let them be put to the proof. He of the fair skin and devout bearing hath doubtless all rules and doctrines at his finger-tips. Ask him."

"Yes, yes; ask him!" chorused the rest. "It will soon be seen."

It was an awkward moment for Pottinger; a crisis demanding cooler courage than that of the mere fighter. Some slight knowledge he had of Shiah doctrine. For the rest, his safety, and that of his comrades, hung upon his own mother wit and the probable ignorance of his hosts. But if the chief were ignorant his cousin was not, as his questions proved. Mercifully, doctrine came first; and Pottinger's strange profession of faith progressed smoothly for a space.

Yes; he was a devout follower of Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet; he failed not in religiously keeping the great feast of the Mohurrum, and he stumbled more or less accurately through the names of twelve rightful Khalifahs since Mahomed, even to Imam-al-Mahdi, in whose withdrawal and second advent all true Shiahs believe. But there were pauses and hesitations that did not pass unobserved; and the eye of Alum Beg

had an evil twinkle as he suavely begged the holy one to name the five correct books of Shiah tradition.

Pottinger moistened his lips, and was acutely aware of Hussain's clumsy efforts to save him from collapse. But he dared not risk any commerce of the eyes.

"Al Kāfi—Jāhzih——" he began, with a deliberate drawl; then—dead silence. The name of the third in order was gone from him: clean gone, after the tricksy manner of names. Beyond its inhuman length and one capital letter, no trace of it remained: and while he racked his memory, under cover of an abstracted frown, the quickened breathing of his companions seemed to fill all space.

Again that evil twinkle in Alum Beg's eye as he asked leave to disturb the holy one's reflections.

"Alas, frail as a bubble in water is the memory of man," sneered he, "even upon matters of so great moment. Mayhap thou hast forgot also——?"

But Pottinger had sighted a way of escape, and prayed God it might serve.

"Sir," he interposed, with a fine mingling of dignity and impatience, "I have given answer so far to the best of my power. But, having spent many years as a soldier in Hindustan, little leisure hath been mine for the study of serious things. Now I am become a free man it shall be otherwise: though time must be allowed before my knowledge can equal that of Alum Beg Bahādur."

The manly words, manfully spoken, sent a murmur of approval round the room; and at mention of India the chief scrutinized afresh this unusual stranger, who had so little of the Afghan about him save dress and beard.

"Thou hast been in Hind?" he queried, to Pottinger's intense relief. "A country of many wonders, if travellers

speak truth—which is as though one said: 'If water runneth up hill.' "

"Not in all cases," Pottinger objected quietly. "Hindostan is greater than the power of man's tongue to enlarge it. A land of mountain and desert, of cities and temples beyond compare, of many creeds and many peoples——"

"Yet not strong enough, by report, to withstand the Feringhis; rapacious sons of Shaitan, who would seize all, from the hills to the sea, though their own miserable island is, to Hind, as a crumb to a cake of bread."

"Size and strength are not always children of one cradle," Pottinger answered, with a touch of warmth that caught the attention of one standing near him; a traveller of note, who had seen Kabul, ay, and even Herāt!

"Belike thou favourest the Feringhi dogs?" he demanded pugnaciously; then, eagerly, to the chief: "Mayhap he is one of them himself! The people of Hind are reported black; and this Syud of little knowledge is fairer than we."

Once more the eyes of all were turned on Pottinger. The blood pricked and tingled under his colour juices. Hussain, distracted by the startling turn of events, opened a cross-fire of vigorous denial. A volley in support from Ahmed encouraged him to persevere. But the accuser, seeing that his remark had made some impression on the chief, held his own, whereat the whole assembly fell a-wrangling—*crescendo*, *fortissimo*, *stretto*—as only Eastern and Southern races can, till Pottinger, boldly confronting his host, begged leave to answer for himself.

A shout and a gesture stilled the uproar. Then the Feringhi stepped forward, squared his shoulders, and spoke.

"Never before, O Yakoob Beg, in this land of open

doors, hath such treatment of travellers been known. Hither are we come, pilgrims, trusting to thy aid; having chosen this difficult and barren route because the Hazaras being Mussulmans, even as we are, we looked for good treatment at their hands. True talk that men from the plains of Hindustan are dark-skinned. But I have said it is a land of many mountains, wherein are folk fair as Afghans."

The chief's nod signified conviction.

"Thou hast well spoken," said he, "and none shall molest thee or thy friends. But the hour of prayer is past; and we would not hinder any man from rendering thanks and praise to Allah. We go to make our own devotions, and thereafter will return."

A few went forth of the room with him. The bulk remained: and it was soon clear that the newcomers had but exchanged one dilemma for another. Here, under a score of suspicious eyes, and in strict accord with Shiah rules, they must achieve the elaborate evening's programme of prayers and devout washings; the posturings, down-sittings and uprisings, without which no true believer dare approach his God.

So distasteful to Pottinger was this form of mockery that hitherto he had managed to evade it, and was now the more at a loss. Of the three, Hussain alone had knowledge of those minute differences in pose and phrase, which, if wrongly rendered, might prove their undoing. With a glance he bade his comrades watch, surreptitiously, and follow his lead; the which they did, their distraught wits sharpened by the knowledge that failure might mean death—or worse. Even while reciting the stately opening verses of the Khorān—"Praise be to God, Lord of all the Worlds! The compassionate, the merciful!"—eye and ear must be kept unceasingly at

strain. Thus and thus must the hands be set upon the thighs; thus the nose and forehead approach the ground; thus, with mutterings of appropriate texts, the washen fingers pass through the beard. Ridiculous and vexatious, it seemed to Pottinger, that a man's safety should hinge on trivialities so puerile. But such is the way of life; and his very annoyance so stimulated his senses that he came squarely through the ordeal—a Shiah proven, in word and deed.

That night he slept in Castle Dangerous, soundly as a dead man, heartened by the success that waits on daring, and hopeful of finding himself a free man on the morrow, with the road he loved underfoot, and the brown thread of it climbing on before him over the shoulder of the hill.

But the morrow waxed and waned, and the next day and the next, and still no hint of permission to depart, nor any possibility of pressing the matter without risk of arousing hostility. To leave without formal permission were a breach of etiquette the more unadvisable because the ice was thin underfoot. Though Yakoob Beg's suspicions had been lulled, it was plain that his cousin's had not. Guests by name, they were prisoners in fact; and on the third day, under cover of curiosity, Yakoob Beg expressed a wish to examine their baggage. The wish was a command; and throughout this fresh ordeal Eldred Pottinger had need of all his coolness and self-control. Though his most compromising belongings had gone *via* Kandahar, there remained items which, if rightly understood, would brand him an impostor and an infidel to boot. Yet must he sit quietly by, while half-a-dozen barbarians rummaged among his saddle-bags, like children over a bran tub.

One flourished his little tin can of medicines, suggesting black magic; and amid a chorus of "*Yujubs*" and "*Wah-illahs*" Pottinger explained that these were being carried to a merchant friend near Herāt. Another snatched up his copy of Elphinstone's "Kabul," and lighting upon strange pictures, brandished one for inspection.

Instantly the rest closed round him, and the clamour broke out afresh. "Idols! *Bismillah!* The work of infidels. *These* be no Shiahs who carry such wares."

Pottinger, tingling from head to foot, dared not risk an attempt at explanation that might only blacken their case. In despair he glanced at Hussain, who flung himself into the breach, with a shout of derisive laughter.

"Infidels, forsooth! By the Prophet's beard it is *ye* that be fools and ignorant, having seen no cities greater than your own mud-builded ant-heap! The Kuzzilbash [1] houses in Kabul are filled with such things. These be no idols, but hand-wrought visions of men and places other than we know."

The chief, listening intently, glanced for confirmation at Pottinger, whose impassive face belied the immensity of his relief. The rest, too impatient to heed, were already wondering themselves crazy over a parcel of reeds, wherein Pottinger had embedded his pencils and compasses to preserve their points.

At length, tired of futile guessings and of Hussain's cunningly complicated answers, they took their leave; and Pottinger, seeing that matters had not gone ill, ventured a hint about the need for marching on toward Herāt.

Yakoob Beg waved a conciliatory hand. "Be not over hasty, my friend. It is written, who travels slowest arriveth soonest; since he stumbleth not by the way."

[1] Persian quarter.

That night, before sleeping, they discussed the possibility of flight. A new and sinister fear had been added to the mere vexation of delay. What if Yakoob Beg were detaining them in the hope that a passing slave-trader might repay him fivefold the cost of a week's hospitality? What if he already had news of one? It was a fear to make the blood of the stoutest run cold. But an hour's talk, over and around the absorbing subject, revealed only a blank wall: and they fell asleep resolved to leave the outcome in higher Hands than their own.

Next day Syud Ahmed went down with fever; and the day after Hussain followed suit. So loneliness was added to all other miseries of Pottinger's plight; not least being the revolt of his native honesty against the call for incessant imposture and deceit.

It was now the 6th of August, a week since they had entered the fatal valley. Pottinger sat in his own corner of the windowless, mud-walled room—shared by all three, for all purposes, day and night—writing up his journal, and marshalling, for the hundredth time, the *pros* and *cons* of his bold schemes for flight. All his young alertness of brain and body fretted against the unseen chains that held him; and the day's events had reawakened his fears of detection. It was plain that the snake of suspicion had been scotched, not killed; that, so far, only good fortune and the interest of new arrivals had saved them from disaster. These last were leaving on the morrow, and Pottinger—too sanguine and high-hearted to despond for long—resolved once again to put forth all his powers of diplomacy and persuasion, to soften the heart of Pharaoh and win leave to go. In that case—fever or no—the other two must take up their beds and walk. Former failures gave him small hope of success.

But his resolve held good; and the event justified him, as it is apt to justify those who hope on in the teeth of failure.

The morrow found Yakoob Beg unaccountably weary of the strangers within his gates; unaccountably ready to exchange them for parting gifts something beyond their means. By noon they were under way, scaling the rocky glen with songs of thanksgiving in their hearts and words of cheer upon their lips: fever itself cured, for the nonce, by the stimulant of freedom and clean draughts of mountain air.

Pottinger, always in the van, had a moment's breathing-space on the ridge of the spur; a moment to look back, with a glow of satisfaction, at the too-hospitable Hazara fort below.

Then, of a sudden, his heart stood still. It was as if an icy hand had touched him. For along the path they had trodden came three scurrying figures, who waked the echoes with shouts that plainly signified: "Halt—and return." The climbers, hearing also, looked back; and there fell upon all the blank silence of dismay. A few counselled flight. But Pottinger bade his party await the result; and the rest followed suit.

As it turned out, they were not needed. The Syuds only were to return; the fair one in particular having been specified by Yakoob Beg. This gave things a blacker aspect. Pottinger, convinced that he would be detained, was too disgusted for speech, and, with such coolness as they could assume, he and Hussain retraced their steps. For the moment hope was dead in them. There seemed, on the face of it, no valid reason for their recall, save the hardening of Pharaoh's heart; and their own within them grew heavy as stones as they neared the esplanade that fronted the chief's castle.

Here was a great crowd of men in evident excitement;

and from their midst came a single shot, followed by prolonged cheers. What this might signify Pottinger knew not; but the mere sound of cheering had a magical effect upon his spirits.

Pressing boldly forward into the open space about the chief, he greeted him with the formal "*Salaam Aleikum*"; whereto Pharaoh made answer cheerfully: "Aha, Syud-jee, thou art too late. I have no longer any need of thee. I did but call thee back to make this gun go off; and lo, it hath gone off of itself."

"I turned to be off too!" wrote Pottinger in his journal, "wishing him most devoutly a passage to Tartarus. But Hussain, having been too seriously frightened to let him off so quietly, burst out into an eloquent oration that perfectly delighted me and astonished the Hazaras."

So much so that Yakoob Beg listened spellbound, while the "worm that turned" denounced them root and branch. "May the devil fly away with you and your gun!" thundered he in conclusion. "Perchance your Mightinesses imagine that we—holy men—will return even from Herāt at your bidding every time it misseth fire? *Wah-illah!* These lords of an ant-heap deem themselves kings of all the earth!"

Then, fearful of having overshot the mark, he turned about hastily, and strode forth of the assembly in the wake of his friend: nor, until they came safely to the stranger's hut outside the walls, did they sit them down upon the rocks to vent relief and vexation in hearty laughter at their own expense.

Then once again they clambered up the glen, with words of cheer on their lips and thanksgiving in their hearts.

VI

It was toward the close of an unclouded day in mid-August that Eldred Pottinger first looked upon Herāt, with the purely observant eye of a traveller and a mind unvisited by prophetic foreshadowing of things to be. For him, the city was merely an interesting feature of the road that lured him on, eternally on till dwindling leave of absence should compel return.

Ten days of marching down from the desolate Hazara tableland and through the steep straight-cut bed of the Hari-rud had brought them out at last into a land of promise and of peace—the astonishingly fertile valley of Herāt. Fallen long since from its ancient empiry as the core of Central Asian traffic and trade, the city, by virtue of its strategic position, has always been recognized as one of the main gateways into India; and as such Eldred Pottinger regarded it with an added thrill of interest, while he and his companions rode leisurely nearer to the irregular bastioned mass set high on its stupendous rampart of sun-baked earth.

Out of the stark desolation of the mountains they had come forth into an oasis close-packed with villages and forts, cornfields and orchards, such as they had not seen since leaving Kabul near a month ago. But by now the high tide of exuberant life had turned. Tulip, poppy, thistle and the sweet low-growing wild rose had been scorched into mummied ghosts of themselves, hiding within their shrivelled hearts the promise of resurrection. Corn and grain-fields, long since reaped and garnered,

showed like monster chessboards cut into squares by irrigation channels empty as themselves; and the double line of poplars bordering the river fluttered here a yellow leaf, there a brown. Only the vineyards and orchards still flaunted their riches. Gold of apricots, melons, peaches and the shadowed purple of grapes cheered the travellers with promise of the one unfailing refreshment Afghanistan has to offer. And still, afar off, the inexorable mountains hemmed them in, harsh, rocky peaks of the Koh-i-Sufaid on one hand, and on the other the sweeping slopes of the Paropamisus range, beyond which lies the home of all the wind-devils of the world.

But as their advance brought Herāt more clearly into view, Eldred Pottinger's thoughts became entirely focussed upon the many-towered, white-walled town, with its high main citadel upon the north side, and beyond it, uprising in boldly majestic outline, the dome and minarets of the great Masulla mosque—the glory of Herāt. He knew just enough of the rival influences at work in the Persian capital to feel certain that the rumours of invasion which had detained him at Kabul were not unfounded, merely premature; that Mahomed Shah, of Persia, would never rest content till he had broken down the independent petty monarchy of Herāt. Raids across the Persian frontier and the selling of Shiahs into slavery seemed, to a man in need of pretexts, provocation enough; a conviction fostered by the Russian Minister, for his own ends. But Pottinger, perceiving no link between his own destiny and the vagaries of Mahomed Shah, casually dismissed the matter from his mind. For himself, he hoped to be well on the road to Merv before any such contingency should arise.

And now, while day burnt itself out behind the hills, they came to the western gate, set in a mile-long expanse

of wall, curtained and loop-holed between the towers; and, passing through, found themselves in a typical mud-built city of Afghanistan: a rabbit-warren of windowless houses, looking upon inner courts for light and air; the streets mere gutters, unpaved, undrained, abounding in refuse-heaps from the blind houses, that would seem to lack nostrils as well as eyes. Yet can each Afghan city boast its own distinctive feature; and that of Herāt is the main bazaar, or Char-Soo, literally Four Streets. These cleave the city from north to south, from east to west; their terminals four iron-clamped gates; their focal point a domed market-place, where Khurd and Tartar, Afghan and Belooch, Mogul and Hindu jostle, shout and cheat one another in more or less friendly unison. At the time of Pottinger's entrance into Herāt the Char-Soo was partially covered in by domed arches built without keystones and already falling to pieces. The holes thus made admitted shafts of evening light that splashed and barred vivid silken hangings, carved woodwork and vessels of brass; pyramids of ripe fruit, grain and spices; bales of Persian embroideries and every form of native craftwork that Central Asia can boast.

But in August 1837 the bazaars of Herāt contrasted dismally with the Charchutta of Kabul, which at this sociable hour of evening would be all astir with noisy, leisurely, good-humoured traffic. Here men went hurriedly about their business as if in fear of their lives; women and children were scarcely to be seen, and the few who ventured out went even more fearfully than the men. All, it seemed, were in mortal haste to re-enter their dark, evil-smelling houses, where some small measure of safety was theirs.

Through the midst of these hapless ones the three passed on, with their modest retinue, till they came to

the central market-place; and on yet again, after needful purchases, to one of the large *serais* that cluster about the Kandahar Gate. Before they reached their destination shop-fronts were vanishing behind shutters, clamped to with iron bars; and the few belated purchasers scurried into the blind by-streets like marmots into their burrows. Plainly, though night had not yet fallen, the day's business was at an end. Puzzled and not a little dismayed by the ominous aspect of things, the men from Kabul halted by the booth of one who clamped his shutters with trembling hands.

Hussain, as usual, spoke for his comrades. "So early to rest brings small profit, brother," said he. "Is it custom here? Or is it for some reason?"

"Reason enough, friend. And as for profit! Good fortune here if a man have not his goods snatched from him without a cowrie's worth of payment." Glancing sharply over his shoulder the Herāti laid a finger on his lips. "In this city the very stones have ears, ay, and tongues also. Surely ye are strangers that ye should ask?"

"We be travellers from Kabul."

"Pass on with haste, then; and give Allah thanks if ye go forth unscathed. Herāt is no city for honest folk. The Shah and his Wazir—devils in the flesh—" his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper—"be gone upon a journey to besiege some fortress of Seistān. But lest harmless folk prosper shamelessly in their absence they have delivered us into the hands of the devil's spawn, son of the Wazir, who filleth his pouches and glutteth his taste for blood while power is his." Again that hunted backward glance. "Get home, friends! Get hence to the *serai* before hell, and the devils of hell, are let loose in our streets. Allah go with you. Though Allah

himself hath seemingly lost will or power in these evil days."

So the three, with their followers, rode on, puzzled no longer, but far from reassured.

Arrived at the *serái*, the same tale greeted them—with variations. Here in an open courtyard charged with friendly evening odours of hookah, spices and burnt cow-dung the restless ones of the earth foregathered—horse-dealers, silk-merchants, holy men and men of the unholiest, united for a moment by the common lure of the road. Among these—having stalled their mounts and baggage ponies—the new-comers sat them down to an evening meal of curry, *chupattis* and curds; one bowl for all, and unwashen fingers for spoons. Pottinger—though more or less inured by now to the close companionship of men strangers to soap and alive with vermin—still shrank from this primitive form of fellowship. But upon this particular evening hunger demanded satisfaction at any cost, and the ancient, inherited need of tobacco was strong upon him. The day's march had been a severe one. Its culmination in this City of Dreadful Night was none of the happiest; and searching inquiry revealed no trace of his former comrades Abdullah and Allah Dad Khan.

Silent as always in a mixed company of strangers, his ears were quick to catch the talk of others; talk such as no new arrival could hear without misgiving. Some said that the Shah and his Wazir were on the eve of return; all seemed agreed that the coming of the Persians, so long a chimera, was now a matter of months. Nor did all regard it as a calamity by any means. For the Herāti, like the Persian, is a Shiah; and the Afghan Sunnis found sect antagonism a serviceable cloak for their innate love of tyranny and rapine.

He who sat next to Pottinger, and had spent two weeks

in the benighted city, dared to speak more openly of its so-called governors because to-morrow he would be on the road again, breathing cleaner air.

"Consider only that which befel, a week past, to him with whom I lodged," he concluded, leaning closer to the pseudo-Afghan and regarding with frank curiosity the colour of his eyes. "One that lived uprightly, harming neither man nor beast. On a night, after dark, hearing sounds in his outhouse, he crept forth, and peering within knew the intruder for a thief of evil repute. Therefore he roused myself and other friends, and between us we delivered that son of Satan to the Kōtwal. Next morning came all of us before his Mightiness the young Sirdar. My friend told the tale straightly after his kind; and the thief told another, after his own. Hearing cries in the night, said he, from the citizen's house, this valiant one had run forth with proffers of help. For reward he had been seized and falsely accused by these dogs of Herātis, whom he had come to aid. It was the word of one man against six, and that one a noted *budmásh*. But it pleased the young Sirdar to assure the six they lied. My friend was sold forthwith to a Turcoman slave-dealer passing through the town; and we witnesses were fined so heavily that all save myself were driven to debt, which is the road to slavery. Two were sold even yesterday. As for the thief—it is now known that he is in the Sirdar's service, and hath reaped a bag of rupees and a dress of honour for his pains! Such is the present fashion of justice in Herāt! Let the Persians come! And these dogs of Sunnis be trodden in the dust!"

The tale roused a subdued hubbub of comment among those who sat near, and under cover of it Pottinger slipped away. Dead tired in body, sickened and disgusted at heart, he sought out a shadowed corner near the stall

where his beasts were tethered. A pair of saddle-bags, uncomfortably well filled, served him for pillow; and with his Afghan cloak for covering he laid him down upon the bare earth, praying—after the simple manly fashion of his time—for strength and guidance in the day of trouble.

There, undeterred by the noise and movement of a crowded *serái*, deep sleep fell upon him. But it did not last. Before midnight he was awakened by the stifling atmosphere and by a restless pariah in pursuit of fleas. With a curse he thrust away the animal, and turning on his side, thought to slip back into the blessedness of oblivion. But the first dead weariness was gone; and though sleep still hung heavy on his lids, brain and senses remained vexatiously alert.

Within the *serái* itself a great silence had fallen. Only from the shadows outstretched around him came the sonorous music of them that slept. But without, the tools of the Sirdar—lovers of darkness—were audibly astir. Sounds more ominous and heartrending could scarcely have been heard were the city already in a state of siege: the tramping of many feet, rough challengings followed by the dull thud of blows upon human flesh and shrieks for mercy that went up unheeded to the blind brilliant sky. The devils of hell let loose indeed!

The uproar seemed to increase and gather strength as the night wore on. But once more weariness prevailed and an hour later he fell asleep again upon a fervent hope that his friends from Kutch would not keep him waiting long in this accursed place, where neither profit for himself nor others might be his.

VII

THE seventeenth of September found him waiting still —not so much for his comrades as for the sextant, compasses and books, too precious to be lightly abandoned. Four weeks and no word of them, nor any means of obtaining it. Visions of further travel grew fainter with each week of delay, and all he could now hope to achieve was a return journey to India by a different route.

But the sanguine spirit of the man was equal to any fortune. The long hot days were spent in writing and studying, whenever his old enemy fever would permit; his evenings, in exploring the city and its relics of vanished greatness. If energy failed him, hours could be idled away under the shade of giant plane trees, set among the roses of the Bāgh-Shah and Gāzur-Ghur, beyond the walls; or in long talks of India with the very holy Fakir, who had tramped a thousand miles or so from Delhi to end his days sitting at the gate of the great Masulla mosque. That marvel of twelfth-century workmanship—twenty-five years a-building and then left incomplete—suffered destruction some fifty years later, when Herāt was threatened by a siege more formidable than the first. But in 1837 it still stood undesecrated. The glazed mosaic tiling of gateway, cupola and minarets still glowed in the strong sunlight; the prevailing flower-pattern wrought out, in mellow tones of brown, copper-green and heavenly flashes of turquoise blue, upon a ground the tint of ripe corn. Purely Persian in colour and design, it was a legacy from the days before com-

petition and the tyranny of time; days when art was the hand-maid of religion, and beauty the Alpha and Omega of the architect's creed.

From the base of the plateau, skirting the foot-hills, ruins and again more ruins of some vaster ancient capital, whereof Herāt itself may have been but the citadel. For here were broken remnants of baths, public buildings, temples and tombs innumerable, from the mosque proper to the mere heaps of stones, with its pole and fluttering wisp of rag, to indicate that the bones beneath were holy. Other wisps of rag—propitiatory offerings of the credulous—were strewn broadcast over these mounds; and when to rags were added the horns of wild goats, exceeding holiness was proven beyond dispute. These and other details Pottinger learnt in long rambles with his Kabul friend, Syud Hussain, himself a traveller, and somewhat cynical in his view of men and things.

Said Pottinger, commenting on the prevalence of rag-bedecked graves: "Verily you Afghans be a nation of holy men, *Syud-jee!*"

And the other, chuckling in his beard: "Of rascals and cut-throats rather! So great is our need of Allah's indulgence that we, being wise, manufacture the means to come by it at every turn. Enough for an Afghan to stumble upon an heap of stones strewn with a rag or two, and at once he will devise the ever-serviceable saint beneath. Remaineth only to pile on more stones, tear a strip from his turban, set it on a stick in the midst—and lo, the wonder is wrought! Others following will add more rags, more stones. Some Mullah will, of his generosity, add a legend—doubtless revealed in a dream!"—Hussain's left eyelid flickered—"and thereafter come pilgrims, miracles, not to speak of many rupees; till

some rival Mullah shall discover a larger tomb, a holier saint, and the pious traffic changeth hands. Verily, a dead dog, among Afghans, hath greater power than many live lions. True talk, Sahib. Even these twin devils, the Wazir and the Shah, will be worshipped exceedingly once the flesh is off their bones. It will be seen—if we live so long! "

A prophecy duly fulfilled.

On the whole, but for minor miseries of dirt, greasy food and hourly risk of robbery or personal attack, the life was less unpleasant than might be supposed for a man partially inured, and eternally interested in thoughts and customs other than his own. But the coming of the Persians was now a certainty; and it would be well to leave before the country became too unsafe for travelling. Still, from day to day he lingered, hoping against hope to recover the treasures that he had, perhaps, been wiser not to part with at all.

In this mood of mind he rode away from the city on that blazing September afternoon to watch the return of Shah Kamrān and his army from a toy campaign, in which had been frittered away men and money soon to be needed for life and death issues. Out of their windowless rabbit holes the people had crept forth, and clustered on the flat roofs and walls, thick as bees, in no spirit of loyalty and rejoicing; simply in a common impulse of eagerness for any *tamásha*, whatever the issue.

Arrived at the foot of a ruined building, Pottinger was hailed by a party of Afghans squatting behind the parapet of its domed roof. "They come! They come!" was the cry passed from house-top to house-top, from wall to wall, and tethering his horse Pottinger clambered up to the nearest point of vantage.

They came: emerging leisurely from the heart of a dust cloud, a straggling, ill-assorted procession: baggage mules and horsemen bearing the marks of battle; criers and executioners, in scarlet head-gear, flourishing grisly Afghan knives and tiger-headed maces of brass; more horses, regally equipped, and closely followed by his Highness the King in a litter of scarlet cloth. Thick-set, pock-marked, and yet more plainly marked by unbridled self-indulgence, there was little of kingliness or of power in the aspect of Shah Kamrān, last but one of a self-extinguished race. His very title had long been little better than a gilded toy, clutched the more tenaciously because the substance had slipped from his hands. But to-day, seated in his scarlet litter, simply yet royally clad, his unimposing forehead surmounted by an imposing turban, the toy seemed almost the real thing. His people shouted—more from instinct than from any hope of redress; and he, drawing the curtains of his litter, returned their greeting with a semblance of kingly graciousness empty as his title.

So he passed on with his escort of royal princes, eunuchs and physicians, giving place—after a due interval of dust and shouting—to the greater man, well content to ride second, because in all matters of moment he stood incontestably first. Him Pottinger scrutinized more keenly, for something of the Wazir's character—his unscrupulous ability, his flagrant traffic in human flesh—had already become known to those interested in the stormy politics of Central Asia.

Here, at least, was power, brutal and barbarous, but yet—power; the virile force that makes history and carves the destinies of men. The coarse, cruel lips, aggressive brows and sharply-sloping forehead were counterbalanced by a handsome beard and eyes singularly compelling; eyes that perhaps explained why the men

who were his tools, though they hated him secretly, failed him never. Before him went the infantry, a motley crowd much the worse for wear; behind, local chiefs with the main body of Afghan cavalry, in a rough attempt at uniform. And as he too passed on, the Englishman, looking after him, recognized that there went a force to be reckoned with, not by himself alone, but by the rival Powers to whom he seemed no more than a pawn—or possibly a knight, from the nature of his moves—in their international game of chess.

The procession ended as it had begun, in a swirl of dust devils. City walls and house-tops took up the dutiful shout of welcome. Then the Herātis crept again into their holes, and Eldred Pottinger, riding leisurely back through the silence and the haze, debated in his mind the wisdom of making himself known. Fresh news of a *kafila* expected from Kandahar inclined him to give his egregious comrades one more chance; in which case it might be safer, and certainly more congenial, to have done with the wiles and evasions of disguise.

Instead of riding on to the city, he dismounted at the Bagh-Shah for a stroll among its rose bushes, now nearing an end of their second glory. The place was almost empty, the air a colourless haze, laden with fine powder of dust. Evening strollers would arrive before long, and footsteps behind did not disturb his train of thought. It was broken abruptly by a hand on his arm, and a deep-toned voice speaking in Hindustani—

"Sahib, these many days I have watched, saying, 'This is no Afghan!' Now I am assured."

Pottinger started, and turned sharply upon the owner of the voice, a benevolent-looking Mahomedan, whose smile of welcome was obviously sincere. "By what cause? And who art thou?" he asked, not at once unbending.

"I am one Hakeem Mahomed Hussain of this city, lately returned from a journey. I am also, from my heart, the friend of all who serve the young White Queen. True talk. Your Honour can speak openly, without risk, to one who has served Conolly Sahib; may Allah grant him health and high promotion!"

"Conolly Sahib?"

The Hakeem nodded, beaming. "Such was my good fortune. He is known to your Honour?"

"By report only."

"Great, then, is the pleasure to come. All who knew him here can bear me witness that, young as he was, through his wisdom and uprightness, he made the English no less famous in Herāt than did Elphinstone Sahib at Kabul. But I, who served him, know, better than all, his nobleness of heart. Me he took with him to India, perceiving my great wish for further skill in the use of drugs, and placed me in the College of Medicine at Calcutta. There, by his help, and the kindness of many Doctor Sahibs, I became so much overflowed with new learning that I can now help, if only a little, these suffering folk of mine own city. The Sahib hath seen?"

Pottinger nodded, frowning. The subject still stirred in him anger too hot for speech. The Hakeem nodded also. "Your Honour's heart is inflamed because of tyranny and torture. Such are not the ways of the English, even with subjects of alien race and creed. In their right hand is justice and in the left mercy. But here——! Your Honour is right. Evils so shameful are beyond speech. You also are travelling, like Conolly Sahib, to increase knowledge?"

"Yes; I am an officer of the Bombay Tōp-Khāna,[1] exploring the country. But I have been hindered and

[1] Artillery.

delayed, awaiting two comrades from Kandahar. Now, however, I leave shortly, come they or not."

"And it is your Honour's pleasure to remain unrecognized?"

"Yes; but to-day I have been thinking—by reason of the Shah's return——"

"Sahib, that is a good thought," the Hakeem broke in eagerly. "I am Herāti. I know. But say rather by reason of Yar Mahomed Khan. In *his* hands are the lives of all. If the Sahib avow himself, all may be well. But if suspicion arise——" he spread out both hands expressively. "How shall the man who knows not truth perceive it on the lips of others? Much trouble might follow, even to imprisonment through hope of ransom. Lose no time, Sahib, I beg. His eyes are in every corner of the city."

Pottinger regarded his new acquaintance thoughtfully for a moment. "You are a good friend, Hakeem Sahib," said he.

The Moslem salaamed almost to the ground. "Your Honour's welfare is as my own; and my house, with such hospitality as I can offer, is at your service from this hour."

If his words had a touch of Eastern fulsomeness, events proved their sincerity; and the Englishman, after a moment's thought, accepted the invitation.

"Allah be praised!" said the Hakeem in all gravity. "And the Sahib will no longer delay to make himself known?"

"To-morrow morning I will wait upon Yar Mahomed Khan," Pottinger answered quietly; and, so answering, rounded the second great turning-point in his life.

VIII

THE house of Yar Mahomed Khan differed from that of the ordinary mortal mainly in size, and in the fact that its great entrance courtyard had the appearance of a barrack square. Here newly-pressed recruits were drilled under the Wazir's supervision; while at all hours the place was thronged with soldiers, petitioners and lesser chiefs, who would cheerfully spend the whole day waiting audience, so long as hookahs and gossip were to be had.

Now, into the midst of these came a Syud of northern aspect, who announced himself as a traveller, desiring immediate speech with the Wazir; and his *kismet* being favourable, delay was short. Thankful for escape from prying eyes, he followed his guide through the stifling dusk of inner passages and rooms to the sanctum of the tyrant whose eyes were in every corner of the city.

Yesterday he had seen the potentate: to-day he saw the man. Fresh from his bath in simple white clothing, Kashmir waistcoat and black Persian cap, Yar Mahomed sat at ease in the mud alcove of his dressing-room, and, rising, graciously returned the stranger's salaam. Then, because it is not meet to come empty-handed before great ones, and because his possessions were few, Pottinger presented a pair of detonating pistols, the most valuable gift at his command.

It seemed the gift was propitious, for the Minister smiled, and, smiling, revealed teeth like weatherworn tombstones, crooked and discoloured.

"Be seated, friend," said he, with a courteous suavity

that almost redeemed his evil aspect. "Your holiness is from Afghanistan?"

"No, from India," Pottinger answered bluntly. "I am no holy man but an officer of the White Queen's Army."

Yar Mahomed suppressed a start of surprise, and his glance dwelt more purposefully upon the stranger's face.

"Blue eyes be rare in my country. I should have known. The Sahib travels for pleasure?"

"Yes, and for better knowledge of men and cities. I had need to adopt the garb of a holy man in passing through the Hazara highlands."

"The Hazara highlands? Aha! A brave man! Next to gold we Afghans love nothing like courage. And ever since the coming of Conolly Sahib your countrymen have been welcome in Herāt. Show me your heart openly, as brother to brother. Have no fear."

Thus encouraged, Pottinger told his tale, if not precisely as brother to brother, at least as man to man; straightly, yet with due reserve.

The Wazir declared himself overjoyed to entertain a nephew of one so well reported as Colonel Pottinger Sahib of Sindh. Nay, more, the Minister Sahib at Tehran had urged, often, the wisdom of sending an envoy from Herāt to the *Burra Lāt Sahib*[1] of Hind. And what better opportunity than the present? Thus would his guest's safe conduct be assured and his own friendship for England doubly proven. He did not add that thus also would his guest be kept under the eye of men instructed to report his every speech and move. He merely begged the Sahib would wait a while longer, that he, Yar Mahomed, might enjoy the pleasure and profit of his society, and might also have time to receive

[1] Governor-General.

certain expected advices from Sir John McNeill. Delay again. But refusal were impolitic, and since he could travel no farther, Pottinger consented to wait a week or two in the hope of regaining his lost property after all.

He waited, a welcome guest in the house of Mahomed Hussain, glad, at last, to dispense with colour stains, and all that these implied. The Wazir's friendliness was unfailing; but two weeks expanded into a month, and still no sign of Allah Dad Khan, nor word of permission to depart. Seven months of living with Orientals, in the vast leisurely atmosphere of eternity, cures a man of counting the hours and days as though they were seed pearls; but Pottinger's small stock of money was dwindling, and time enough must be allowed upon the return journey for unforeseen exigencies by the way. By October, the Persian army was reported well beyond Meshed, and he had no wish to be caught like a rat in a trap.

At the end of the month, having but five ducats left, he sent word to the Wazir, begging him to nominate an envoy and give him leave to depart. For answer, his presence was requested at the Minister's house forthwith; and hopeful of at last obtaining final instructions, Pottinger obeyed.

He was received this time in Yar Mahomed's private hall of audience, where he and a posse of local chiefs passed the time, swaggering mightily of Afghan prowess and the drastic treatment Persia should receive at their hands.

Pottinger, as usual, was made heartily welcome, even to the elaborate Afghan embrace. Then said the Wazir, motioning him to a seat of honour: "This is no true

friendliness, O Pottinger Sahib, this eagerness to be gone when trouble is at our door."

"But, Wazir Sahib, consider——"

"Nay, listen, till you hear our wishes in this matter. For the present I send no envoy to India. Instead, I request that you prove the good feeling of your country towards mine by remaining in Herāt to give such help and advice as you are able. In plain speech I will not give you leave to go."

Here was a *volte face*, startling as it was unwelcome; and the Englishman had some ado to keep himself in hand.

"Is it friendliness on your part, Wazir Sahib?" he protested, not without heat, "to bid me remain, when it is well known to you that I am not free to go or stay at your pleasure or my own. If the soldiers of your army take leave, must they not return within the given time? To overstay my leave of absence may mean loss of promotion and will assuredly deprive me of any *izzat*[1] I might otherwise earn by my travels. Consider, then, if I am blameworthy in asking leave to go."

Yar Mahomed scowled thoughtfully at the Persian rug on which he sat. To blame this straight-spoken son of Britain were folly; impolitic, also, to retain him against his will. But the Wazir was a shrewd judge of character. He had recognized long since the uprightness and courage hid beneath Pottinger's plain, unobtrusive bearing; and had, no doubt, perceived how these might be turned to his own account. This soldier of the White Queen was not his to command. But there were other methods; and for all his ingrained brutality, Yar Mahomed could be, if necessary, the most plausible, the most persuasive of men.

[1] Honour.

When he looked up again, the frown was gone. "You are right, my friend. If you feel bound to go, I have no power to command that you remain."

But at that all the chiefs who were present set up a clamour of remonstrance, declaring, in spite of their former swagger, that without this English officer (experienced in the infernal ways of guns) to reorganize the defences and speak with the enemy in the gate, Herāt would fall in pieces at one blow.

In the midst of the Babel Yar Mahomed appealed to Pottinger, with shoulders lifted and hands eloquently outspread. "You see how it is with us, Sahib? So great is our faith in the dreaded Feringhi when there is fighting and difficult work to be done. It is true, also, that you have eaten our salt, and it is against our custom for guest to desert host in the time of trouble. Can there not any arrangement be made, any communication with your Government, to explain?"

This cunning appeal to the other's generosity did not fail of its intent. Pottinger's belief that the city must fall quickened his British predilection for the forlorn hope, the losing game.

"Sooner than seem discourteous, Wazir Sahib, I am at your service," he answered simply—burning his boats. "I will take the chance of my explanation being accepted by Government. But I must tell you frankly you will find me quite a useless person, having no political authority to interfere in your affairs, and small knowledge of British relations with Persia or with your own state."

Yar Mahomed dismissed minor considerations with a sweep of his hand. He had gained his point. It was enough. Pottinger must needs endure a second embrace and an ovation of Eastern compliment.

"Friend and ally of princes in distress! True source

of a valorous and noble origin, may God prolong your days! May you be upon the carpet of wealth and fortune and rise to the seat of magnificence and power. As for lack of knowledge and authority, our *izzat* is increased merely by your presence in our midst. With the Kajjar,[1] I am told, come two gentlemen *Sahibān*. It is meet that Herāt also should possess a gentleman Sahib to speak with them, and enforce fair bargain between oppressors and oppressed."

Such words from such lips made Pottinger smile to see how completely change of position will change the point of view. But the assurance that Sir John McNeill would accompany Mahomed Shah set his last doubts at rest; and he went forth from the assembly, to ponder at leisure on the abrupt, unlooked-for turn of events.

By way of preliminary, he insisted on writing at once to Captain Burnes, long since established at Kabul, where he had been treated with confidence and friendliness by Dōst Mahomed Khan, and hoped, in return, to achieve the closer alliance with England on which the Amir had set his heart.

To his uncle in Kutch, Pottinger wrote a fuller account of himself and his position: made all arrangements to lodge with Conolly's Hakeem, and thereafter devoted himself zealously to the repairing of defences, that at many points were fast crumbling to decay.

About this time runners brought news that the Persian army had reached Toorbāt, not a hundred and fifty miles distant. The advance guard, alone, was reputed ten thousand strong; and Herāt, from a population of seventy thousand, could but muster ten thousand troops all told. Her effective fighting force numbered

[1] Persian.

only half that amount, undisciplined and ill-trained. With these and ten guns—such as they were—four miles of wall must be defended against an organized army, far too well provided with cover, in the shape of villages, ruins and orchards, crowding, on the west and south, to the very base of the gigantic earthworks, their strongest rock of defence.

Even the most sanguine could not call the outlook other than unpromising. But if the enemy found cover ready to hand, he should at least not find forage and food. These were poured into the city daily from surrounding villages; and with them came peasant folk in their scores and hundreds, craving protection. Streets and bazaars swarmed with a restless, panic-stricken multitude. The very ruins were tenanted, and five or six families occupied the house of one. But to bring in all the produce of that amazingly fertile valley was beyond human power; and the word went forth that the residue be destroyed: outstanding crops, forage, and even the very orchards that might serve as firewood.

To these wholesale precautions without, Yar Mahomed added precautions within against the ever-present danger of treachery or open revolt. These took the characteristic form of fines, torture or imprisonment wherever infidelity was suspected; or, more often, perhaps, wherever hid treasure was rumoured to exist. The man's greed of money amounted to a disease; and now to his natural appetite was added the stimulus of genuine need. All Herāt knew this, and trembled; each asking the other, "Who will be the next?" The very Mullahs of the Shiah sect were seized and imprisoned lest they stir up the people.

Upon the ramparts a wholesomer activity prevailed. The noise of building, the ring of the hammer upon iron

filled men's ears all day and often half the night. Scout parties went forth to harry the advancing troops and cut off stragglers. These returned with few prisoners and loud denunciation of the Persians as the most contemptible cowards in all Central Asia. Was ever the like heard, that men, calling themselves soldiers, should march in a close-packed mass guarded by guns, like a crowd of fearful women, instead of straggling hither and thither to display their own daring and give the enemy a chance to do likewise! Wait only till those women-warriors sat down before Herāt; then would the thwarted heroes prove upon their bodies the stuff whereof the troopers of Afghanistan are made! Meantime, the tale of their preliminary captures multiplied, like the men in buckram, and the less adventurous were duly impressed.

As for Eldred Pottinger, throughout the stir of preparation, wherever active, honest work was toward, there he was to be found; directing, exhorting and, when need be, putting his own hand to the plough. For him the whole affair was a unique adventure, undreamed of in his wildest imaginings. After weeks of aimless waiting, the demand for definite action was pure relief, and the prospect of his first taste of warfare stirred the fighting blood in his veins. True, his isolated, undefined position bristled with difficulties, but he was not of those who go half-way to meet them. Like all men of practical power, he gave himself, with both hands, to the present moment, the present need. As regards the future—one duty, at least, was plain. It was his to uphold—in word and act—the character of a British gentleman in the eyes of those who knew him, and of the God in whom he believed with a simple, whole-hearted faith, less rare in the early days of Victoria than in those of King George.

And still—day by day—the Persian force crept nearer:

a force formidable enough, by all accounts, to make short work of Herāt, in spite of swaggering Afghan heroes and a Feringhi officer Sahib, who spoke little and achieved more than all the said heroes put together.

A sharp spell of frost, in early November, raised hopes that a severe winter might prevent the horrors of a long investment; but upon the 15th came couriers from the frontier with news that startled and dismayed the bravest. The fortress of Ghoriān, reputed stronger than Herāt, and defended by a picked garrison under Yar Mahomed's own brother, had surrendered to the Shah. A disaster so unexpected suggested treachery or cowardice within the walls. The Wazir took the blacker view; openly denounced Shere Mahomed true son of a Kashmirian mother, and pushed on the defences with redoubled zeal, that it might be seen how an Afghan of unmixed birth would defend his own.

But the days of preparation drew to an end; and the day of action was at hand.

On November the 22nd the advanced guard formed up on a wide plain to the north-west, and the voice of Mahomed Shah's field artillery was heard in the land. Guns from the city towers flung back the opening challenge, and a preliminary skirmish ensued. On the 23rd came the great main body—Persian and Russian, but no British ambassador, to Pottinger's regret. McNeill had sent, instead, his assistant, Colonel Stoddart, to look after British interests and, if might be, patch up a reconciliation between Shah and Shah.

But now, at all events, the word was War. Earthworks were thrown up, a vast camp sprang magically into being. Ruins, orchards and enclosures under the ramparts were occupied in force. The siege of Herāt had begun.

BOOK II

SOLDIER

We take up the task eternal, and the burden, and the lesson—
Pioneers! O Pioneers!
Conquering, holding, daring, venturing, as we go the unknown ways—
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

. . . . . .

Not for delectations sweet;
Not the cushion and the slipper; not the peaceful and the studious;
Not the riches, safe and palling; not for us the tame enjoyment—
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

WALT WHITMAN.

I

War, that breeds heroes and proves men, as the furnace proves the potter's vessel, has few horrors, in her long and varied list, to outrival that of a protracted siege. And in an Asiatic city horror is piled on horror by gratuitous brutality, by all-pervading dirt, lack of drainage, discipline, and the power to act in unison.

Such were the conditions at Herāt when thirty thousand Persians sat down beneath her ramparts and opened hostilities with an imposing discharge of artillery that set her rotten parapets falling like tinder about her defenders' ears. But at that time neither side dreamed of a protracted siege. Mahomed Shah was out for conquest and looked to make short work of it; the most sanguine Afghans did not expect to hold out more than a few weeks, while to Pottinger it was plain that the Persians needed only engineers and a skilled general to carry all before them.

Happily for Herāt they possessed neither, but were at the mercy of many masters, each intent upon his own laurels, his own chosen point of attack. Unity of plan or concerted action there was none, nor even, for a time, any attempt at stringent investment. With true Oriental improvidence and bombast they made haste to exhaust their ammunition in spasmodic outbursts of firing, the range too erratic, and the whole affair too casual to do much mischief. But the whistle of flying bullets and the flaring rush of rockets overhead struck terror into the fearful Herātis, huddled in masses on the roof-tops,

wailing and beseeching Allah to ward off the fire-born spirits of evil that added a new terror to life. Shells thrown less at random left ruin in their wake; dust, charred woodwork and human fragments horrible to see. But for the most part the firing was directed against the parapets; and the mass of rubbish, falling inwards, was promptly utilized by Pottinger to support the battered fortifications. Thus, the body of the old rampart became a parapet, and the summit of the new, built from within, a point of vantage for defending breaches when made.

Whether these ever could be made became more and more a matter of question as day followed day, and beyond their lively display of fireworks the Persians gave no sign of an organized attack, or of a bold attempt to take the place by escalade. Sorties and skirmishes kept up a creditable air of hostility; and by means of the former the Herātis carried on, with more dash than science, their spirited defence. Three out of the five city gates were kept open; supplies brought in and cattle sent out to graze. By night they sallied boldly forth to harry the Persian sappers and plunder their tools. By day the heads of the slaughtered were joyfully paraded on the ramparts, to the infinite disgust of Pottinger, who could never speak of "this barbarous and inhuman conduct with any temper." For the Afghans, the public flaunting of their prowess was the best part of the fun; and since rewards were forthcoming, the warriors outvied one another in their zeal.

"Regard favourably, oh thou Mighty, the valour of this slave!" cried one upon a day of December, when Yar Mahomed stood on the works, with his young English ally, discussing the details of the next sortie. A pair of blood-stained ears emerged from the speaker's tunic, and from his lips a circumstantial tale of his en-

counter with the victim. Duly rewarded with a cloak and a handful of ducats, he seized them and fled without staying for further boast or compliment.

Half-an-hour later came a fresh adventurer, disfigured with the stains of battle.

"The reward of courage, O most Valiant!" said he, and laid a mud-smeared head upon the ground.

Yar Mahomed, turning to give the order, kicked aside the pitiful object, and so became aware of a deficiency.

"Oh, ho! Was this unfortunate born incomplete?" he asked, with a grim chuckle. "Or be the ears God gave him hid in thy tunic for the next occasion?"

Without answer and without reward the hero vanished from the ramparts; and a retainer, picking up the trophy, recognized it for the head of a comrade fallen on the preceding night.

"*Inshallah!* these be mighty men of valour!" shouted the enraged Wazir. "Go, belabour the scoundrel without mercy. And as for him of the ears—any man who can may possess himself of the cloak and ducats, ay, and of the long tongue that stole them. Shameful talk, that lies be rendered in place of service for a mere handful of silver!"

The bystanders, in duty bound, chorused approval; and Pottinger, musing upon a certain tale of the pot and kettle, went back to his house.

That night it was told him in confidence that a Shiah Mullah, suspected of hidden wealth, had died under the hands of the torturers.

In this fashion December dragged wearily to an end. Within a month some thousand rounds of ammunition had been wasted upon mud walls, proverbially unresponsive to anything more disturbing than dynamite or heavy cannon. Convoys had been despatched for a fresh supply.

But their return would be a matter of weeks; and in the meantime the besiegers bethought them of methods more effective than spasmodic fireworks. Early in the New Year it was discovered that active mining operations were being carried on at several points, a discovery that filled Afghans and Herātis alike with the bewildered, unreasoning terror of the unknown. Visible bullets, flying at noonday, were as nothing to the devil that worked in darkness under their feet; and a proclamation went forth, calling upon the Mullahs to collect fresh working parties from among the people.

It was while this new panic prevailed that Shere Mahomed—sometime Commandant of Ghoriān—appeared beneath the walls and demanded audience of the Wazir. The demand was refused in language more peremptory than polite; and for answer came word of warning that unless Herāt were given up, he—Shere Mahomed—would be slain, the city stormed, the Wazir hanged like a dog and his womenfolk publicly dishonoured.

But even in the hour of panic Yar Mahomed was not the man to be browbeaten by empty threats.

"Bid the Sirdar Sahib carry my thanks to the Shah-in-Shah," replied he, "that he saveth *me* the trouble of killing a traitor who is no true brother of mine. *When* the city is taken Mahomed Shah may deal with me as he wills; remembering always that I am his Majesty's most faithful servant. Only in this matter obedience is impossible. The Afghans will not hear the surrender."

So Shere Mahomed went away sorrowing, with the curse of a vengeful brother on his head. Herāt was not given up, neither was he slain nor the fortress stormed. But the incident had set Yar Mahomed thinking; and not many days later Pottinger received word that the Wazir wished to speak with him on a matter of importance.

II

Not without cause did Yar Mahomed Khan, of Herāt, become known as the Napoleon of Central Asia, though the Asiatic's genius was rather that of the keen-witted unscrupulous politician than of a conqueror and leader of men. Singleness of purpose—outside the paramount purpose of his own advancement—was a state of mind unknown to him. "Heads I win. Tails you lose." There you have the man's mountain-top of philosophy to which he clave through his long, unedifying career with a constancy worthy of a higher creed.

Even in the early days of preparation for war he had written smooth words to the Most Exalted, Light of Religion and Father of Victory, begging that he would honour his faithful servant by a visit to Herāt, there remaining till it should be his pleasure to march on Kabul and Kandahar; and for these good offices he had been promised ultimate possession of Kamrān's kingdom. Yet, when there came news from Kandahar that its chief leaned towards Persia, Yar Mahomed wrote—in righteous wrath—of disgrace to the Afghan name, and of his own willingness to deliver Herāt itself into their hands sooner than yield it to followers of Ali![1] Again, while impressing on Pottinger, with engaging frankness, his sincere desire for British help and British good will, he secretly assured his Eastern friends that all he wanted of England was gold, and if that were not forthcoming no longer would he tolerate the infidel within his gates.

[1] Shiahs (Persians).

The infidel's own opinion of the man and his methods is worth recording.

> "The minister, throughout all negotiations . . . invariably threw the blame of the defence on some one else, and regretted being obliged to fight. He also avoided mixing himself up with any act decidedly hostile to Persian prejudices; allowing some of his friends to act, and then, under a show (to the Persians) of inquiry, sharing the advantages. . . . With that shrewdness which characterizes the Afghan nation, he saw the favourable position he was in and availed himself of it to the utmost. . . . He therefore addressed himself to the task of defence, but took steps to secure his own interest in the event of a reverse."

With just such a step in view he had sent for his young British friend, the one human being in a city of thousands on whom he could implicitly rely. Lest some unforeseen catastrophe arise, it were well he should lose no time in sending a diplomatic message of mediation to the Great King: and now it seemed that the acceptable moment had arrived.

He received his visitor alone, without formality; and Pottinger, knowing his man, guessed what was in the air. A smile of mutual understanding passed between them, and for a moment neither spoke.

A notable contrast at any time, these two; but the effect was heightened since Pottinger had dispensed with colour juices and washed the dye out of his warm brown beard. He still wore Eastern dress, as much for convenience as for lack of any other; and a year's exposure, *plus* artificial staining, had darkened his fair skin almost to the tint of an Afghan mountaineer's. In both faces

it was the eyes that arrested attention and struck the keynote of character. But from the blue ones there looked forth a soul of innate and steadfast nobility; while the brown ones glowed with the fire and force of a mind unhampered by the soul's superfluous sensibilities. Both men were amply endowed with physical courage and strength of will; both possessed the hall-mark of character—individuality, by virtue of which they stand forth in high relief against the confused background of that seething, suffering city, whose immediate fate lay more or less in their hands.

For the rest, day and night had more affinity than they two; and a friendly alliance between such mighty opposites—each so typical of the East and West they stood for—had in itself all the elements of drama.

Yar Mahomed broached his plan without preamble, adding by way of inducement: "For such an undertaking there is but one man acceptable in all Herāt. No Afghan would venture: no Shiah could be trusted. Remaineth only yourself. You are willing?"

"Assuredly. In this, as in all else, I am at your service. It will be a great pleasure to meet Colonel Stoddart and speak my own language again. You have letters? For me?"

He glanced eagerly at three folded and sealed slips of paper in the minister's hand, for the superscription was English, and words from the outer world were jewels beyond price.

"One of them, yes. From Kandahar. Leech Sahib no doubt. These others, that are for McNeill and Stoddart Sahib, you can deliver. But first, by God's goodness, we are enabled to overlook the contents."

Pottinger frowned sharply. "Excuse me, Wazir Sahib. In all straightforward work I have said you may

command my services; but if you open other men's letters you must find some one else to read them."

The Asiatic shrugged his shoulders. "A wise precaution, that is all. You followers of the Nazarene lose much by your squeamishness. But in this case the gain is mine, giving fresh proof that we can send you in all confidence to speak with our enemies. To-morrow, at this hour, you shall wait upon the Shah. To-day, because of the cough that troubles him, he hath taken an over large dose of the *dewai* [1] which cureth every ill!"

He showed his discoloured teeth in an evil grin, and Pottinger understood. It was well known in Herāt that Shah Kamrān, prematurely broken down by unbridled licence, was now completing the process of degradation by drink. He, whose gusts of passion had set men's hearts hammering against their ribs; he, who in lustier days had openly ransacked the houses of his subjects with a band of armed retainers, seizing whatever chanced to take his fancy, from wife or daughter to a bagful of ducats; he, Shah Kamrān, last of the Saddozais, was now little more than the peevish appendage to a fluttering pulse and a haunting fear: the fear of a poisoned morsel or the knife between the shoulder-bones that would end all. As a matter of fact he was strangled in Yar Mahomed's own good time. Meanwhile, a serviceable puppet, jerked alternately by his Wazir and his chief eunuch, he soaked in spirits and lived almost like a prisoner in the Arkino, or high citadel at the northern end of the town.

Thither Pottinger was led next morning: elated at the prospect of adventure that might release him from an anomalous position and Herāt from the miseries of investment.

[1] Medicine.

Passing through the by-ways of the city, where hardly a shop had escaped destruction, his heart was smitten afresh with pity for those hapless ones, for whom were all the bitterest dregs, whether of defeat or victory.

Arrived at the Arkino—a fort within a fort—Pottinger was ushered into the cheerless room of state, furnished with a carpet and cushions, with eunuchs and a chief physician always at hand to proffer some new and infallible *dewai*, whose precise effects concerned the royal invalid far more nearly than the fate of his city. The Englishman's arrival interrupted an absorbing colloquy on the results of a cooling draught administered that morning: but at sight of the envoy a sudden spark glowed among the half-extinguished ashes of kingship.

"Aha! Pottinger Sahib, friend of Yar Mahomed and defender of our great city, go boldly forth, bearing a Shah's message to a Shah."

A wild, incoherent message it proved; a long-winded catalogue of merits and wrongs, ingratitude and injustice, and culminating in a rude outburst of mingled self-pity and reproach.

"Behold, how generous is the conduct of Mahomed Shah! Is it nothing that I refused help to usurping princes and rebellious chiefs, looking in return for troops and treasure to regain mine own lost kingdom? And now, my supplication is answered by the roar of cannon and bombs, the cry of the wounded and the odour of the dead! Say to him: 'Here be my women and children; and as I have resolved to die in their defence, rather than yield, I send to ask what he requireth at my hands.'"

Exhausted with his own eloquence the king lay back, breathing heavily; and Pottinger, all eagerness for the morrow's venture, made haste to be gone.

But when he called on the Wazir next morning it was only to find that obstacles had arisen and the whole affair was postponed. The sortie of the preceding night, from which much was expected, had failed signally. Moreover, there were reports afloat of an immense gun in active preparation: a gun whose bullets were to pierce the mud walls of Herāt as though they were glass. At such a moment suggested mediation would seem a mere confession of weakness; wherefore the Shah sent word that the going of Pottinger Sahib be delayed till the Afghans had at least struck one determined blow in their own defence.

This they achieved, with questionable success, on the 26th of January. But Asia has a genius for shirking the decisive issue, and not until the 7th of February did Pottinger obtain leave to depart.

In the interval his heart had been rejoiced by the recrudescence of Allah Dad Khan, with all his treasures intact, and a tale of plausible adventures longer than his turban. As regards the truth of these Pottinger made no stringent inquiry. He was too thankful to recover his belongings and to secure the services of a man he could trust. Allah Dad Khan might be stupid and hot-headed; but his experience of Sahibs had taught him that straight dealing was the sole way to gain and keep their favour.

On the morning of the 8th, then, Eldred Pottinger left his belongings in charge of his new-found friend, and rode forth of the gate that is called Kutb-Chak, bearing not only "a Shah's message to a Shah," but also Yar Mahomed's diplomatic greeting to the Wazir. Word of an Afghan dignitary, coming to make terms, had sped on before; so that the streets between the tents were thronged with a shouting, surging multitude, and

the escort had need to lay about them vigorously in order to reach the Persian minister's tent. Here, to his delight, Pottinger gained leave to call on Colonel Stoddart, who overwhelmed the bearded stranger with an effusive Asiatic greeting.

Laughing heartily, the other answered in English; and Colonel Stoddart stepped back in amaze—

"What! Is it Pottinger—the soul of the defence? My fellow announced you as the *Moojtehid* of Herāt! Come in, man, come in. This is a pleasure indeed! Coffee at once for the Sahib," he commanded, as they sat down and rid themselves of the crowd.

Only the Englishman who has spent months alone among Orientals can conceive what it means merely to return an English handclasp, to hear an English voice. And these two were, in addition, fellow-soldiers, fellow-pawns on the great chess-board of Central Asia.

Said Stoddart: "I am told we owe it mainly to you, under Providence, that the Herātis are giving our Exalted One more trouble than he bargained for. At the rate you are strengthening your defences the place will soon be impregnable. Keep them up to it, sir; keep them up to it! We need *time* to shake a chronically sleepy Government wide awake. Our news is beginning to disturb the official *Burra Sahibs* at last, and it's my belief that we shall soon have Sir John himself here as mediator. For a Persian victory means Russia dominant in Herāt. Your people show no sign of climbing down?"

"No. They are sick of fighting and not over flush of money; but I am only the bearer of polite messages and don't expect to accomplish much. I have letters though. One for you——"

"Ah, Burnes! I had been hoping for news. It seems the Bear has got her paw on Kabul now. But

from all accounts Dōst Mahomed is giving Vickovitch the cold shoulder and standing fast by Burnes. Sekunder the Great has his failings, and diffidence cannot be counted among them; but he'll square the Afghan alliance, if the gods of Olympus give him a chance. Now for his letter, and you shall share the news——" But steps and voices without betokened interruption. "Devil take these Asiatics!" cried Stoddart, whose patience was short and curiosity keen. "As for you, my dear sir, resign yourself to leagues of long-winded, irrelevant discussion!"

Pottinger had his fill of it before the day was out. Bidden first to the Wazir's tent they found him surrounded with the usual crowd of friends and retainers: a thin, small man of mean aspect and bilious temper. But they were received with a fine show of graciousness, and the "most noble," after compliments, was asked of his message from the *Prince* Kamrān to the King of Kings.

"My message is from the Afghan king to the Persian king, and to none other," Pottinger answered, with his quiet directness of look and speech. "As regards the greeting to yourself from Yar Mahomed Khan, I should prefer greater privacy."

It was accorded—not with the best possible grace: and Yar Mahomed's proposal that the Shah return to Persia, whither he himself would follow, to give true proof of sonship, was dismissed with undignified contortions of disgust. Was there no limit to the arrogance of these Afghans? Was not Herāt set down as a Persian province even upon the maps of Great Britain?

This last both officers denied; and were favoured, straightway, with a detailed history of Persia for the last fifty years. Finally Burnes' map was called for, in

proof of their fallacy; and lo, Herāt appeared within the Afghan border!

The volcanic little gentleman turned indignantly upon Stoddart.

"Why, then, Colonel Stoddart Sahib, hath the British Government, while professing friendship with Iran,[1] never sent word to *us* of the insult upon the map?"

Stoddart replied gravely that he had no instructions in this matter. He was not aware that his Government had ever received information of Herāt having been *annexed* by Persia. He would refer the case to the Envoy at Tehran.

The undernote of irony was quite lost upon Haji Akasi, champion-in-chief of Persian almightiness: but at the preposterous word annexation, he writhed anew.

"*Bismillah!* How should the Defender of the Faith *annex* that which hath been his own since the days of Nadir Shah? Who careth for maps? Herāt remaineth a province of Iran. Therefore let Prince Kamrān and his Wazir approach, with due humility, and kiss the feet of the Asylum of the Universe, who will permit no foreign Government, Russian, Turkish or British, to make disturbance between himself and his subjects. If the *Burra Lāt Sahib* hath another opinion, let him send a man to tell me his mind. Then will I also send a man to your young Queen, Buktoria, that the province of Ireland belongeth not to her!"

"There be some that might agree with you, Haji Sahib!" Pottinger remarked, smiling. "But when am I to deliver my message?"

The small man sprang up in haste.

"I go to prepare the way, that both may have audience. *Then* it shall be seen if the Asylum of the

[1] Persia.

Universe will suffer dictation at the hands of Afghan or infidel."

It was seen; and the Asylum of the Universe did not suffer dictation.

Very plainly clad, and enthroned upon a cheap English chair, in the corner of a double-poled tent, his appearance scarcely sorted with the fulsome string of titles that were his. But his personal servants stood afar off with heads bowed above folded arms; and the British officers must approach with all due ceremony, pausing and salaaming three times during the process.

The interview lasted three-quarters of an hour. It began, in dignified fashion, with a plain statement of Mahomed Shah's just grievances against Kamrān. It swelled to a bombastic outpouring, typical of his race, and culminated in the ultimatum that, unless his five proposals were complied with, he would not rest content till he had placed a garrison in the citadel of Herāt.

Since those five proposals included kissing the feet of the "Asylum," restoring prisoners and supplying troops for Persian wars, there remained no more to be said. The officers retreated backwards, saluting three times as before. Negotiations were at an end.

III

THROUGHOUT that night and all next day hill and valley were lashed by the devastating breath of the Shamshir,[1] the Boreas of Central Asia. Rain, hail and wind culminated in a knee-deep fall of snow that transfigured camp and fortress and tenderly veiled the battle-scarred face of the land. Followed a sharp frost, and, upon the morning of the 10th, Eldred Pottinger carried back to Herāt the mortifying word of failure, that fell like a blight upon the whole expectant city.

Delay had given time for hope to run high; and Pottinger, speedily summoned to the citadel, did what he might to soften the blow. Hampered though he was by lack of political knowledge and authority, his two days in camp had not been altogether vain. He could, at least, bring word of a dispirited army, unpaid since leaving Persia; of increasing scarcity, desertion and flagrant excesses that had converted every village into an enemy. Consoling news, that brought a gleam back into the royal eye and steadied the perturbation of the royal pulse.

Followed a council of war, resulting in a unanimous vote for British protection on any terms; and that night letters were written to Lord Auckland, also to Burnes, through whom the appeal must be sent. Thereafter Pottinger made out his own unvarnished official statement, accounting for his presence at Herāt and his independent line of action.

[1] Cimiter.

To Burnes he wrote informally of his experience as envoy, adding: "The city is very much stronger than it was at the commencement of the siege, and the Afghans are confident and in high spirits. They want but money. . . . For my own part, I have little doubt, from what I now know of both parties, that the taking of Herat by the present Persian army is little less than an impossibility."

Some misgiving of this complexion must have disturbed Mahomed Shah, after his interview with the superfluous young Englishman, whose presence in Herāt seemed to have changed the whole complexion of affairs within the walls. The 68-pounder, also, that was to have broken up the walls like glass, had broken up, instead, its own ill-constructed carriage, and lay, like a dead elephant, cumbering the ground.

Thus beset, the Most Exalted descended a step or two from his unassailable eminence. And behold—a few days after his inflated ultimatum—a Persian emissary at the gate of Herāt: an emissary with peace upon his lips, and a private reminder that it behoved all true Moslems to make common cause against English aggression, under the Father of Victory and Defender of the Faith, who would, hereafter, enrich them with the plunder of India and Turkestan!

High-sounding speech; but the slipperiness of Persia is proverbial: and Yar Mahomed—after due consultation—sent answer that if the Shah-in-Shah spake truth, he could prove it by removing his army from the walls of Herāt. As regards foreign mediation, the Afghans placed implicit confidence in Lieutenant Pottinger, and if the Shah would do the same by Colonel Stoddart, all might yet go well. Thus, in one breath, this most politic of men flattered the racial pride of his ally and shifted

all blame for further fighting on to the shoulders of Persia, should she refuse to trust her English guest as Yar Mahomed, the unimpeachable, trusted his own!

And in less than a week that same trusted guest found him secretly corresponding with a Russian officer, known as Samson Khan! The discovery led to a heated scene between these ill-assorted allies: nor was the matter smoothed over till the quietly persistent subaltern had compassed a written statement to the effect that no treaty could be entered into without the sanction of Great Britain.

But for all his decisive bearing at such critical moments Pottinger was acutely alive to the difficulty and delicacy of his position. There were times of heart searching, when he doubted whether—as an officer of a neutral Government—he had any right to take an active part in the defence; feared also lest his Afghan friends should misconstrue his zeal in their service and believe him to have been, from the first, a secret agent of the Indian Government. But, whatever the issue, to withhold practical help, so greatly needed, was not in the nature of the man. He could but meet each crisis as it arose, to the best of his power, and leave the event to God.

And still, throughout February and March, emissaries came and went. And still, while the lips of the Most Exalted spoke peace, he did not cease from the strengthening of trenches, or from carving cannon balls out of marble wrenched from sacred graves. On two sides the Persians pushed their approach closer, till investment was complete, and real pressure began to be felt. No provision had been made for a siege of months. Sheep and grain were already scarce. The water supply having

been cut off, all that remained in cisterns and reservoirs had become indescribably foul. Actual scarcity there was not, since water could soon be reached by digging. The one serious lack, as Pottinger had said, was money: how serious, he did not discover till March was half over and the siege near four months old.

The fashion of his discovery was Eastern to the core. A pressing invitation from the Wazir's scribe, Mirza Ibrahim, resulted in a rigmarole of innuendo, in cautious curvettings and amblings round about the most delicate subject on earth, till Pottinger, losing patience, demanded bluntly: "Is it that you need money, Mirza Sahib, and you wish to know if I can supply it?"

But for his colour, the Mirza must have blushed at this naked presentment of his decorously draped request. Great was the penetration of the Sahib! It could not be denied. There had been difficulties. Even strong pressure brought small result. How wring water from a dry dish-cloth? But the Sahib must understand, he, Mirza Ibrahim, spoke from his own grief of heart, without authority. The Wazir Sahib had, indeed, desired to speak. But the Englishman, being his guest, modesty forbade!

Pottinger could not repress a smile. If Yar Mahomed had taken modesty to wife the day of miracles was not yet done.

"Still," said he, "if I am to assist the Wazir in this most delicate matter, he must needs overcome his modesty, so that I may be fully acquainted with his present difficulties and his future intentions."

The Mirza bowed low and departed. But the delicate process of overcoming Afghan modesty took time. Even when invited to dinner, the Wazir could not bring himself to broach the subject of money; and each fresh oppor-

tunity given found him increasingly coy. At last the Englishman fairly lost his temper.

"This is the conduct of children, not of *men*," he remonstrated, on the Mirza's third invitation to dinner. "If the Wazir is *really* too modest to speak, let him write!"

The ironic suggestion was solemnly accepted, and as solemnly carried out. By an interchange of formal notes in the third person, modesty was propitiated, and the way made clear for speech.

To Yar Mahomed's ingenuous suggestion that his ally should lend him money on the security of the crown jewels, Pottinger replied: "My friend, I am no merchant; and if I possessed money enough for such a transaction I would give it willingly, without talk of pawn or purchase. Why not arrange the matter with the Hindus, who could get you money from Kandahar?"

But it appeared that the Hindus shirked the risk of dealing with crown jewels; or, more probably, the risk of dealing with Yar Mahomed Khan, and Pottinger agreed to conduct the affair himself on two conditions: no foreign intercourse without the consent of Lord Auckland; no prisoners to be sold, but detained for ransom or exchange. Promises being cheap, were readily given; and that night three letters were dispatched to Alexander Burnes, without whose sanction Pottinger would do nothing.

His own letter contained an informal account of the whole transaction and of his view on the general situation.

"In my former letter," he wrote, "though I mentioned money, I had no idea of the destitution to which they are apparently reduced, and this knowledge has changed my confidence in their success. The result now

depends upon the answer you send to this application. . . . I shall, much as I dislike the undertaking, endeavour to pawn the jewels, and trust I shall be able to raise sufficient to last till your reply comes. . . . Thus, having given you a statement of affairs, I beg to say a word of myself. Without any authority, I am acting the part of British agent here, thereby laying myself open to the displeasure of Government, not only for meddling in what does not concern me, but also for neglecting the duties on which I was sent to these countries. Except for the private communications of Colonel Stoddart and Mr. Leech, I am totally ignorant of the wishes of Government; but I have done and shall continue to do my utmost to preserve our interests here, taking care to commit no act of hostility which can be construed into involving the British Government. You wrote to me in October that you were authorized to send one of your assistants to this place. I shall consider it a personal favour if you do so, and thus relieve me from the anxiety of my present situation; and if not, that you will authorize me to act here on the part of Government till orders may arrive."

Such occasional comments, in demi-official letters, and certain extracts from the lost journal are all that remain to throw any light on Pottinger's personal thoughts and feelings throughout those long months of hardship, anxiety and strain. But, even from these, it is evident that no idea of gleaning honours or advancement from the great adventure visited his mind. A mild official "wigging," allowing for pressure of circumstances, was far nearer to his expectations: such being the common lot of unauthorized ones who have the courage to act on their own responsibility at a crisis. No doubt he hoped, secretly, that if Burnes could relieve him, he

might yet gain a fresh grant of leave to complete his frustrated journey of exploration.

In the meantime it was his—without authority, without political knowledge, and with small experience of actual fighting—to defend and preserve the independence of Herāt to the best of his power. In this sole purpose he and Yar Mahomed were at one; and, as the precious month of seed-time drew to an end, it became clearer than ever that both armies were heartily sick of the struggle. But upon certain points neither monarch would give way. Said Yar Mahomed after a last vain colloquy with the Persian general: "All things are written in the book of Fate. But one thing is certain. So long as the Shah-in-Shah demands acknowledgment of sovereignty, there can be no hope of peace."

Yet upon that night of early April the British Ambassador from Tehran had halted but four days' march from the city, and with him came his assistant secretary, Major D'Arcy Todd, a Bengal gunner, eager for political distinction, whose name was destined to be linked with that of Herāt almost as closely, though far less happily, than Pottinger's own. The move, prophesied by Stoddart, had been precipitated by a certain letter from Leech at Kandahar, and McNeill—lately authorized by Lord Palmerston to denounce Persia's enterprise as an unfriendly act—had hurried down to the camp, without awaiting official instructions. For at that time a severe epidemic of Russian scare prevailed, not only in Central Asia, but in Westminster and Calcutta. Rightly or wrongly, it was believed that the fall of Herāt would be an inevitable prelude to further Russian aggression, further intrigue, under cover of supporting the claims of Mahomed Shah.

Viewed in the truer perspective distance gives, later historians have denounced these fears as chimerical, and those who entertained them as alarmists. It is easy to pass such verdicts when the cards are on the table and the game played out: easy to censure McNeill's overhastiness, Burnes' excitable letters—the outcome of a temperament prone to exaggeration, more especially when it served to enhance the importance of his own mission. But it is a question whether England has not suffered worse things from her proverbial blindness to the shadows cast by coming events, than from the voice of the "alarmist," who has occasionally been known to speak truth. Certainly, at the time—making due allowance for bias of temperament—it seemed evident that the Asylum of the Universe and the Father of Victory was little better than a vassal of the Bear. Hence the obsession that Persian success spelt imminent peril for India.

Folly or no, England had clearly everything to gain by preserving the independence of Herāt, and of her rival's active interest in its downfall there were proofs in plenty: this among others, that while England, in the person of McNeill, sped southward, Russia, in the person of Count Simonich, followed after. And with the appearance of both ambassadors in camp, the siege of Herāt changed its character. From a squabble of small significance, between two Asiatic chiefs, it developed into the opening moves of that great international game of chess, which has gone on at intervals for near a hundred years. Whether it is even yet played out remains for future historians to say.

IV

"PROPHESY now to us, O Pottinger Sahib, what will be the outcome of this new happening? And if the Russian Elchee be following after, as is said, which will win the ear of the Shah-in-Shah?"

Yar Mahomed brought down a heavy hand upon the shoulder of his friend, and those about him chorused his request. "Tell us, Sahib, what is the thought of your heart?"

But Pottinger shook his head. "I am no prophet," said he. "But this I know for certain. McNeill Sahib will exert all his power to preserve the independence of Herāt."

He spoke his thought honestly, as of habit, yet not his whole thought. Assuredly McNeill would do all in his power to avert what seemed—in the fevered anxiety of the moment—almost a national calamity. But since his arrival, two weeks ago, Pottinger had begun to doubt the extent of that power.

True he had little but guesswork to go upon. His attempts to communicate with Colonel Stoddart since their meeting had failed time after time, and the appeal to Burnes seemed like to prove barren of result. It had been crossed on the road by a letter from Kabul giving no very promising account of the progress toward an alliance whereon Burnes had set his heart. The obstacle, strangely enough, was not Dōst Mahomed Khan, but the Calcutta Government, whose attitude was no less disheartening to its own envoy than to the Afghan chief.

None the less, at the time of writing neither the Amir nor Burnes had quite given up hope. For the rest, he lauded, in high terms, Pottinger's share in the defence of Herāt, and felt justified in giving him freer scope for action by asking Government to appoint him Assistant to the Kabul Mission. Frontier political service was the craze of the moment, and it is difficult to name a soldier of that period who would not have leapt at such an offer. But Eldred Pottinger, with his head full of schemes for further exploration, begged to decline the honour. All he asked was the support of Government authority for the time being.

As for the Wazir and the King, disappointment at Burnes's silence was tempered by the good news of McNeill's arrival in camp. But it seemed there were complications. Colonel Stoddart—with the injudicious freedom of speech that more than once wrought harm to himself and others—had made no secret of the reason for his senior's sudden move, and so put the Shah on his guard. Not until the 13th had he granted audience to the White Queen's minister, who had thereupon denounced the attack on Herāt as a violation of the Perso-British treaty, and refused to accept the Shah's denial. Yet upon the 16th, after a second interview, the Persian soldiers had proclaimed from their trenches that the British minister, as mediator, would shortly enter Herāt.

It was now afternoon of the 18th, a day of unusual activity without the walls. Mediation might be in the air, but until peace was established Herāt should have no rest. Since early morning the Persian guns had been battering the ramparts behind the great mosque with disastrous result. Northward and eastward practicable breaches yawned, and that in the western wall had grown

wider than ever. Yet were the Afghans nothing daunted. Their true defences, said they, were the ramparts and *fausse braies*. Of these there were two—upper and lower; deep, half-covered trenches cut out of the thickness of the ramparts, but reached from within by a hole through the city wall; and Persian attempts to establish themselves in these trenches had so far been vain.

It was at the main danger-point, near the latest breach, that Yar Mahomed and Pottinger sat, with a group of Afghans, discussing the fresh possibilities involved in the Russian minister's approach. A Persian emissary had just confirmed the report, heightening its effect by inflated comparison between Russia, the all-powerful conqueror of Europe, and that arrogant slip of an island (he indicated its length with one finger) full of rich *bunnias* [1] in place of a soldier-log, so that only by paying much money to other governments could any *izzat* be maintained.

Pottinger kept silence till the worthy's volubility ran him out of breath, then he remarked quietly: "If England be so insignificant a country, how strange that men should thus exert themselves to decry her power! Stranger still that only a few years ago the mere disapproval of England sufficed to check the march of a Russian army on Tehran, and to preserve the King of Kings from becoming a vassal of that empire."

The inflated one, being destitute of rejoinder, made haste to be gone, leaving food for lively argument behind him. With the two rivals-in-chief at their very gates the question of supremacy touched the Afghans nearly indeed, and Yar Mahomed, applauding Pottinger's assurance as regards McNeill, added shrewdly: "In this quarrel between such mighty states, no doubt we must in time be

[1] Merchants.

trampled to death; and the English being more upright, we do well to abide by them. Do I not speak truth, my friend?"

It amused him to try to lure the British subaltern into a boasting match such as Afghans delight in. But Pottinger would not be so enticed.

"In my opinion, naturally!" he answered, smiling. "Every one thinks best of his own country. But kingdoms, like men, must be judged by actions and their results."

"Well spoken, Sahib," cried an Afghan officer with whom Pottinger had become friendly. "As for results—let only the English lead the Afghans against all Asia—then it shall be seen! But until you frighten us your Vakils and Elchees can do nothing. March fifteen regiments to Kelāt; then command the Sirdars as you please!"

Pottinger laughed.

"But England has no wish to invade your country or to command your army," said he in all good faith, little guessing how soon she was to give his statement the lie. "Besides——"

Shouts from below and a renewed outburst of musketry put an end to talk. With answering shouts the Afghans sprang up, flourishing their weapons and challenging the Persians to come on, in defiance of the Wazir's repeated commands to take shelter from the storm of bullets that here and there achieved deadly work.

Pottinger had sprung up also on to the banquette where they sat, and, keeping within shelter, had a glimpse through the parapet of a lively encounter going on below. For many minutes he stood there, absorbed in the struggle, quite unaware that his breast rested against a loophole loosely blocked by a brick. Those on the banquette behind him were regaling themselves with tea and

rough jokes at the expense of a "valiant one" whose blade had been shattered by a bullet, and who now clamoured for a sword to brandish in the face of those fire-spitting devils under the walls. Pottinger's friend, Deen Mahomed, called out to him to sit down and share the fun. But the scene below fascinated him, and he paid no heed until his friend laughingly forced him to his knees by tugging at his Afghan cloak.

He had not been seated three minutes when a bullet crashed through the very loophole he had leaned against, shattering the brick and knocking down the favourite eunuch of Yar Mahomed Khan. The man was carried out mortally hurt, and for some moments the Wazir looked after him, moved, it is to be hoped, if only for so short a space. Then turning to the Englishman, he smiled grimly.

"Great is your *kismet*, O Friend of Princes! But that the hand of God wrought through the hand of Deen Mahomed, yourself had been carried out there."

Pottinger nodded gravely. "I am sorry for your loss," said he. "A stout-hearted fellow and a faithful servant."

"True. Yet more easily to be spared than the ally and defender of Herāt. May God prolong his days! Small wonder that we have withstood the whole army of Irān, seeing that one so favoured of Allah fights within our walls."

Pottinger accepted the compliment at its worth, knowing well how the superstitious Afghan venerates him of good *kismet*, be he scoundrel or saint. At that moment a flying messenger broke up the warlike tea-party, and the two, who were never long away from the post of danger, hurried to the breach.

Next day brought the first welcome event in the deadly

monotony of the siege, an event joyfully hailed by all as the beginning of the end. In the morning came Major Todd, in quest of Kamrān's formal consent to British mediation—the first European soldier in uniform to enter Herāt. Streets and roof-tops were thronged with starveling citizens, childishly agape at the tight coat and overalls, cocked hat and epaulettes of that strangest of all strange beasts—the Feringhi in his habit as he lived. Courteous and pleasant-spoken, he found favour up at the citadel; found also that the character of his unfamiliar-looking brother officer had wrought unquestioning faith in British prestige.

Mediation being agreed upon, he rode back in high spirits to the Persian camp; and that same evening, after the dispersal of Yar Mahomed's assembly, came a messenger reporting that the British minister himself sought entrance to the city. The scattered assembly was hastily called together again, while Yar Mahomed, with Pottinger and a fitting deputation, hurried to the south-west angle to welcome Sir John McNeill. A man of no little talent, with twenty years' experience of Persian politics, he was strongly of opinion that, in the interest of England and Afghanistan, Mahomed Shah must by all means be kept out of Herāt. Naturally, therefore, he was looked upon as a "Daniel come to judgment."

Half the night was spent in animated discussion; and not until the small hours did the two Englishmen repair to Pottinger's quarters for a brief spell of sleep. Already McNeill had perceived that Stoddart spoke truth when he said: "I am told Pottinger is in high esteem among the Afghans"; had seen, also, that but for this fate-sent subaltern of Eastern aspect Herāt would never have held out till now. For all his virility, the Afghan is only formidable when attacking. His rough-and-ready valour

evaporates under the strain of fighting against odds; for which reason the men of Herāt probably owed less to Pottinger's military skill than to his stubborn fortitude, energy and power of resistance.

Sir John McNeill, considering these things, emphasized his approbation by the practical conclusion that he could not do better, in the interests of the city, than strengthen the hand of its gallant defender by appointing him British agent, with full authority to act on behalf of Government.

So much for the "official wigging," and for dreams of further exploration! They had reached the Hakeem's house by now, and for some minutes Pottinger stood silent.

"Well? What is the obstacle?" Sir John asked kindly. "You accept, of course?"

But the younger man, flushing awkwardly, shook his head. "Believe me, your Excellency, I fully appreciate the compliment; and I am more than ready to go on doing my utmost in the capacity of a friendly British subject. But I have no wish to entangle myself with Central Asian politics, and I have already refused the same offer from Captain Burnes. Government approval and authority to act, for the time being, are all I need."

Sir John McNeill must have considered with some puzzlement this unusual specimen of a British officer.

"But you have plenty of capacity, my dear sir," he urged, still more kindly. "And this is not the sort of appointment that promising young men refuse out of hand. Think it over, and let me know your mind before I leave in the morning."

But whatever Pottinger's inmost reasons may have been, his mind had long since been made up; and he was at all times a man difficult to bend from his decision.

By way of "thinking it over" he laid him down and slept soundly till after six, when he awoke to find his guest already up and busy writing.

At seven o'clock word was sent to Yar Mahomed that the Ambassador was ready to receive him. He came with all speed, and when Pottinger met him at the door he was still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

"Is it custom for your ministers not to sleep at night?" he asked, laughing, yet genuinely amazed. "Scarcely had I closed my eyes when I am told 'His Excellency awaits you'! Who can wonder that your undertakings prosper and your *ikbāl* [1] is great when men of such high rank, far from the eye of their sovereign, work harder than any Afghan soldier, even in presence of the Shah!"

Thus Yar Mahomed—arch-villain; yet, in McNeill's opinion, the "ablest man of his race and age." And, on this occasion at least, he spoke truth. It is this very quality of thoroughness, of steadfast duty-doing for duty's sake, that has done more than force of arms or legislation to advance the lines of British dominion in the East, and to keep it paramount, often against overpowering odds.

Before McNeill went up to the citadel Pottinger repeated his decision of the previous night; and the older man, thoughtfully regarding him, said no more. That afternoon the Ambassador left Herāt, fortified by Shah Kamrān's assurance that any reasonable terms tendered through the British minister would be accepted by his Government; and not long after his departure a sealed note addressed in his hand was delivered at Pottinger's quarters. Half puzzled, half anxious, he broke the seal and took in the contents at a glance.

[1] Prestige.

"In spite of your repeated refusal," wrote McNeill, "I could not but do what seemed most urgently advisable before leaving Herāt. I therefore told Shah Kamrān and his minister that you are now the accredited agent of the Government, and as such of H.M. the Queen. Whether you are averse to the advancement or merely diffident of your own capabilities, believe me, Mr. Pottinger, it is for the good of the service that you should accept the situation."

In the face of such plain speaking Pottinger could not but accede, and that cheerfully. For a man may be no self-seeker, and yet be keenly susceptible to appreciation when he has done his utmost in difficult conditions. Nor was this the last time that he was to be pushed, in his own despite, to the forefront of political service. If ever man had greatness thrust upon him, that man was Eldred Pottinger, the defender of Herāt. So little, in one sense, is even the strongest master of his fate.

At the moment he looked on the appointment as a temporary measure, in case of emergencies, since the day's events convinced him and his Afghan friends that, at long last, the siege was nearing an end. So also thought Sir John McNeill, in spite of an approaching Russian ambassador and his own exhaustive experience of Persia's political coquettishness—to use no harder word.

But it was not so. The full brunt of the struggle had yet to be endured. On the morning of Sir John's visit to Herāt, Count Simonich entered the Persian camp. He was not the man to let grass grow under his feet, and two days later Major Todd brought word that the Asylum of the Universe had peremptorily refused the proposed agreement, and had repeated his ultimatum of two months earlier: "Either the whole people of Herāt shall

make their submission, or I will take the fortress by force of arms."

It was Pottinger's uncongenial task, as agent, to explain how Sir John himself had been deceived; and the Afghan king, though bitterly disappointed, declared that he had expected no less from the most faithless nation on earth. Such was the disgust of Yar Mahomed and the chiefs that it was debated whether any answer at all should be sent to the hostile insult of Mahomed Shah. But consideration for the British minister prevailed.

The reply was written by Yar Mahomed and showed the man at his best. "Be not distressed. Now that we have suffered so many injuries and have been kept back from our tillage and cultivation . . . what have we to care for? If the Persians will not listen to your words, we must answer with our bodies, and leave the result to God."

V

It was on the 23rd of April that D'Arcy Todd rode into Herāt with the message that incidentally announced Russia triumphant. It was upon the 26th that "Sekundur" Burnes rode away from Kabul, disheartened and disgusted with the policy that had wrecked his mission and dissolved his private visions of knighthood into thin air. Worse than all, his departure also implied Russia triumphant. Even before leaving he had suffered the supreme mortification of seeing Russian promises scattered abroad like seed at harvest time, and Russia's supposed agent publicly paraded through Kabul City.

No presentment of the Afghan drama would be complete without a word of this significant prologue played out on the scene of ultimate disaster by Alexander Burnes and Dōst Mahomed Khan, known among his people as the *Amir-i-Kabir*.[1] Faulty men both, in many respects; but in this case shamelessly traduced, for the benefit of a Government graceless enough to evade responsibility by blackening their characters.

It is not to be denied that Burnes used commerce as a cloak for political diplomacy; that he was sanguine and credulous; a man of talent and ready wit, rather than of character and judgment; quick to catch the note of alarm that rang out from John Company's offices in Leadenhall Street and echoed through the wide spaces of Central Asia. But—he believed in Dōst Mahomed Khan, and proclaimed that faith from the first, in no uncertain terms.

[1] Great Amir.

As for the Amir, whose supremacy and friendliness were India's best asset, he was no whit less eager for the alliance. All he asked was the common give and take of a fair bargain. Witness the fluent pen of Burnes—

> "Dōst Mahomed Khan has fallen in with all our views . . . has cut asunder his connection with Russia and Persia and refused to receive the ambassador from the Shah, now at Kandahar. His brothers in that city have, however, caressed the Persian Elchee all the more for this, and I have sent them such a Junius as I believe will astonish them."

This letter was never published; and the following extract from an account written to Macnaghten, a few weeks later, was also suppressed, when the whole garbled correspondence was utilized as a just pretext for a notoriously unjust war.

> "The present position of the British Government at this capital appears to me a most gratifying proof of the estimation in which it is held by the Afghan nation. Russia has come forward with offers which are certainly substantial. Persia has been lavish in her promises; Bokhara and other states have not been backward. Yet in all that has passed . . . the Chief of Kabul declares that he prefers the sympathy and friendly offices of the British to all these offers, however alluring they may seem, from Persia or the emperor—which certainly places his good sense in a light more than prominent, and in my humble judgment proves that, by an earlier attention to these countries, we might have escaped the whole of these intrigues and held, long since, a stable influence in Kabul."

Given these premisses, the result seemed inevitable as a proposition of Euclid. But, while Euclid's problems depend on unvarying lines and angles, those of national politics hinge upon that eternally unknown quantity—the human equation. A Governor-General "cold, cautious and well-meaning, but infirm of purpose"; a triad of secretaries overbold, ambitious and scared out of their political wits by the presence of agents, other than British, within the sacred borders of Afghanistan; an Eminent Authority from Leadenhall Street breathing out wars and alarms; a Russian Ambassador paying the troops before Herāt; and lo!—the lines broken up, the angles distorted, the inevitable proposition gone utterly to pieces; its scattered fragments only to be cemented again by blood and tears.

Whose the initiative and whose the blame it were difficult, and perhaps ill-judged, to say. There were many ready enough to father that uncalled-for army of the Indus while victory was its portion: none readier than the aforesaid Government secretaries, able and zealous men, all; though, at that time, more zealous for the accomplishment of their own ambitions than for their country's prestige in respect of righteous dealing toward neighbouring states. Of these, William Macnaghten, secretary-in-chief, was doomed to overleap himself and fall on the other side. But in that spring of '39 his star was nearing its zenith. Gifted, scholarly and distinguished, a member of the Simla Cabinet, he enjoyed the private ear of a Governor-General separated from his Supreme Council, and himself afloat upon a sea of political conjecture with no sound general principle for rudder. And in those days there were adverse winds abroad in the lands between Peshawur and Tehran.

Briefly, the position was this. India needed a strong,

reliable buffer between her and the supposed invader. Dōst Mahomed, powerful as he was, reigned over a house divided against itself. Two refractory brothers ruled at Kandahar. A third, Sultan Mahomed—described by him as a bitter enemy and treacherous friend—had ruled at Peshawur till it was cunningly wrested from the Afghans by their formidable Sikh neighbour, the Lion of Lahore.

It was the restoration of Peshawur—Kohinoor among Afghan cities, and winter resort of former Amirs—that Dōst Mahomed craved in return for his own practical proofs of friendship. But Burnes had "no power to treat of matters political," and substantial assistance was not in the bond. It was his to demand that the Amir should give up all equivocal intercourse with Persia, Russia and Turkestan; all hope of regaining Peshawur from the Sikhs; and to proffer in return assurances of Viceregal sympathy, empty and brittle as a blown egg-shell. For many months Dōst Mahomed had looked anxiously for the coming of his good friend "Sekundur Burnes," secure in the will and power of the English to lighten the embarrassments that were thickening about him. And here was the result!

Even the first day of meeting struck a prophetic note of disappointment. British liberality had become a tradition in the land, and Dōst Mahomed—like any other Asiatic ruler—was childishly eager for those ceremonial gifts, whereby he might estimate the friendship of the giver. Jewelled swords, guns, robes of honour and costly embroideries—these would surely be his in token of friendly alliance between chief and chief. But Burnes had been warned against extravagance, and bidden to choose presents that "should exhibit the superiority of British manufacturers." Judge, then, the feelings of his

host, when these were solemnly brought forth. For himself a telescope and a pistol; for his *zenana*, pins and needles, scissors and a few trumpery toys. It is said that "Dōst Mahomed exclaimed with a 'Pish!' as he threw them down before him: 'Behold! I have feasted this Feringhi to the extent of six thousand rupees, and have now a lot of pins and needles and sundry pretty toys to show for my folly!'" And again: "The ridicule and disgust excited in the Amir's family did more to lessen the agent's ascendancy at Kabul than can easily be imagined by those unacquainted with the potency of back-stairs influence at an Eastern court."

In the Afghan's opinion such initial niggardliness boded no good for that which was to come. Nor was he mistaken; as he learnt to his cost.

But the good-will and pliability of Burnes being already known to the Amir, no doubt he hoped—even in the face of disappointment—to find the agent an apt instrument for carrying out his scheme of a consolidated Afghanistan, strengthened by a friendly alliance with Great Britain. And the notable contrast between the two men went far to justify such a hope.

The Dōst—handsome, manly, with the muscular build and aquiline features of the finer Afghan types—looked every inch of him the iron-handed ruler and shrewd, vigorous individual that he was. Burnes, on the other hand, lacked presence, dignity and reserve; qualities peculiarly needful to him who would command the respect of an Eastern chief. His singularly round eyes had an air of furtive, restless intelligence, devoid of real penetration or power; nor were they notably redeemed by the long, drooping nose, or the pleasure-loving mouth and chin, the former adorned with a dapper moustache sharply twisted at the tips.

Travelled, accomplished, and a lively talker, he might

well have attained popularity among the Afghans, but that his very eagerness for that vain and doubtful good led him into extremes neither admirable nor wise. Like many another Anglo-Indian of his day, he interpreted something too literally the old traveller's saw: In Rome, do as Rome does. When adopting Mahomedan dress, he also adopted Mahomedan habits of life; not excepting the harem system. Yet was he still so far from true understanding of the Eastern temperament, that he thought to ingratiate himself by making light not merely of religious differences, but of religion in general; and believed himself successful because, out of courtesy, the Afghans laughed at his jokes: a mistake for which he paid heavily in the stormy days that were to come. Even at this early date his lack of dignity and of diplomatic caution seems to have alienated the respect of the chiefs; while yet they hoped that his good-will might serve their present purpose and cement the desired alliance with Great Britain.

It soon transpired, however, that Burnes, the commercial agent, could neither commit himself nor compromise a just and generous Government; but he could and did write for further instructions, enlarging on the friendliness of the Amir. The former were unavoidably long on the road; and, in the meantime, came warlike news from Herāt with rumours of defection at Kandahar, sufficiently alarming to Burnes' excitable temper.

> "The chiefs of Kandahar," he wrote to a friend, "had gone over to Persia. *I* have detached them and offered them British protection *and cash* if they would recede and if Persia attacked them. I have no authority to do so. But am I to stand by and see us ruined at Kandahar, when the Government tell

me an attack on Herāt would be most unpalatable? Herāt has been besieged fifty days; and if the Persians move on Kandahar I am off there with the Amir and his forces, and mean to pay the piper myself! . . . I am on stirring ground: and am up to it in health and all that. I was never more braced in my life."

He was in high spirits at this time; undismayed even by the appearance of a Russian agent in December.[1] And in truth the man's reception only set Dōst Mahomed's sincerity in a clearer light.

Burnes' own unofficial account of the event is spirited enough, and very characteristic.

"We are in a mess here! Herāt is besieged and may fall; and the Emperor of Russia has sent an envoy to Kabul offering Dōst Mahomed money to fight Ranjit Singh!!!!! I could not believe my ears or eyes; but Captain Vickovitch arrived with a blazing imperial letter three feet long, and came immediately to pay his respects to myself. I, of course, received him and asked him to dinner. This is not the best of it. The Amir came over to me, sharp, and offered to do as I liked; kick him out or anything. And since he was so friendly to us, I said, give me the letters the agent has brought, all of which he surrendered sharp; and I sent an express to my Lord A., with a confidential letter to him-

[1] Whether the man was in truth an accredited Government agent, Russia's tyrannic methods make it hard to say. Certain it is that he was sent by the Government of Orenberg. Yet when, in '39, England remonstrated, Russia knew nothing at all of one Vickovitch, his works and ways. But Vickovitch knew Russia. Perceiving that he was to be the scapegoat, he wrote a few bitter lines, burnt all his other papers, and blew out his brains.

> self . . . telling him that after this I knew not what might happen. And it was now a neck and neck race between Russia and us. If his Lordship would hear reason, he would forthwith send agents to Bokhara, Herāt, Kandahar, and not forgetting Sindh. How this pill will go down I know not: but I know my duty too well to be silent."

Duty or no, Burnes had a constitutional weakness for his own voice and the airing of his own views. Unlike Pottinger, he *did* shine on paper; though, in all he writes, allowance must be made for a tendency to over-colour plain facts and exalt the importance of any post he chanced to fill. His letters have the individual note of the cheerful egoist; letters in which the man's flippancy, vanity and personal ambition peep out with engaging *naïveté* between the lines.

But his belief in India's imminent danger, however exaggerated, was at least sincere. And while he awaited the result of his representations in favour of Dōst Mahomed, conferences multiplied at the Bala Hissar; blown eggshells being cheap, and the Amir, as yet, being unaware of their emptiness.

January brought letters from Olympus, less discouraging in tone,[1] and, on the strength of these, the urgent Peshawur question was discussed in all its bearings. "Better, surely," urged Burnes, the persuasive, "waive your own claims to Peshawur and remain content with such restitution as can be made by an amicable arrangement between Sultan Mahomed and the Sikh Maharaj."

Whereto the Amir made answer, more in sorrow than in anger: "Of a truth, Ranjit Singh, having taken

[1] In the published Blue Book an attempt was made to conceal the fact of these having been received, that Burnes might appear to have acted without authority.

Peshawur, may bestow it on whom he will. If on Sultan Mahomed—brother in blood, though not in deed—mine own city would not be safe for a day. Such form of help, given by the Indian Government, is but paving the way to my ruin. How, then, shall I be grateful for your Lāt-Sahib's interference, or make promise of services in return? Even now this most brotherly of brothers hath sent an agent to the ex-king (Shah Shujah) to seduce the Kandahar chiefs from their allegiance and help that other to drive me from my throne. What security have I, through his Lordship's good-will, against repetition of such treachery? Should I not find, when too late, that he had helped me to place a snake in my bosom?"

Questions hard to answer with honesty; and the Amir, mollified by Burnes' evident sympathy, added feelingly: "See, my friend, I have unbosomed my difficulties to you, without suppression. I shall ever remember the good intentions of your Government towards me, and ever regret that interests of my country did not permit acceptance of proposals tendered in friendship, but which seemed to me, and my advisers, only opening the door to my ruin. If your Government will look into this matter, they will see that no other policy can I safely pursue. As for the ex-king, he is powerless without help from your Government, which I am confident he will never receive."

Alas, for confidence, so soon to be shattered! And again Burnes could do no more than report the conference at full length, while recording his own opinion that the Amir "is simply pursuing the worldly maxim of securing himself from injury"; that "his arguments seem deserving of every consideration; the more so when an avowed partisan of Sultan Mahomed" (the Nawab Jubbar Khan) "does not deny their justice"; and,

finally, that "his interests are bound up in an alliance with the British Government, which he will never desert as long as there is a chance of securing it."

Shameful to remember that neither these, nor any other letters favourable to the Amir, were published as they stood till twenty years later, when Dōst Mahomed had returned, long since, to the seat of power, and all was as it had been, save that Burnes, and a hundred better men, had paid the price of a disastrous policy, and the bones of a massacred army lay whitening in every pass between Kabul and Peshawur. Shameful to realize that, through despatches deliberately mutilated in compiling the Blue Book, the characters of Burnes and of Dōst Mahomed were so effectually lied away, that both appear to have done what they ought not to have done and the reverse. "Official documents," it has been truly said, "are the sheet-anchors of historians. . . . If these are tampered with—the grave of truth is dug: and there is seldom a resurrection." Or else—as in this case—it comes too late.

But in January 1839 Burnes still pleaded, Dōst Mahomed still hoped against hope.

Not for much longer: February brought the end in sight. First, discouragement for Burnes, in the shape of a letter from Macnaghten, that ran to twenty-four paragraphs, whereof twenty-one were suppressed. It was "with great pain," wrote Macnaghten, that his Lordship approached the subject of those "entirely unauthorized" promises held out to the chiefs of Kandahar. His Lordship was compelled "entirely to disapprove of them." [1] He only refrained from direct disavowal there-

[1] It is but fair to record Lord Auckland's ultimate admission that the best authorities at home roundly asserted the wisdom of the measures he had so severely condemned.

of lest it weaken the influence of the already paralyzed Burnes. But, should matters remain uncertain, and the chiefs look to fulfilment of the vain hopes held out to them, it would be the plain duty of Burnes to admit that he had "exceeded his instructions." In any case he was enjoined, for the future, to conform punctually to orders issued for his guidance. If he had been hampered formerly, behold him now effectually chained to a policy he had good reason to disapprove.

In justice to Lord Auckland—who depended entirely on others for information—it should be remembered that the dispatches of Burnes necessarily passed through the hands of Captain Wade, British agent in the Punjab, and as hot a partisan of Shah Shujah as Burnes of Dōst Mahomed Khan. Thus the Kabul letters, before reaching Simla, were often modified or invalidated by plausible arguments and bold assertions, which Burnes had no chance to see or refute. Wade urged, before all things, the importance of conciliating Ranjit Singh, both in respect of Peshawur and of Afghan sovereignty. It was in this connection that he first actively pressed the legitimate claim of Shah Shujah, whose elevation to the throne would be in the nature of fulfilling a compact already made, and who would demand no new concessions from the Sikhs. In fine, it was a question of expediency against principle: and who that knows the history of mankind in general could doubt the result?

The suggestion arrived at the psychological moment. The Home Government had already echoed McNeill's alarms. Burnes himself had exaggerated the import of Vickovitch and his "mission," and there seemed small hope of a placable arrangement between Dōst Mahomed and Ranjit Singh. All things conspired to drive a harassed Governor-General along the line of least resist-

ance: and before February was out there came letters to Kabul that fairly extinguished hope in the hearts of Burnes and the Amir. His Lordship, it seemed, had no intention of complying with the latter's proposals and requests. Peshawur belonged to the Sikhs. Theirs it must remain.

"Then, and not till then, a change came over the conduct of Dōst Mahomed Khan." Not till then did the star of Burnes begin to set; the star of Vickovitch arise and shine. He himself has left it on record that from December to the 20th of February he had been no more than two or three times in the presence of the Amir, who daily conversed with Burnes. If, after the 20th, matters took another turn, who shall blame the chief?

But, even so, the end was not yet.

During the first week of March honest efforts to effect a compromise were made by the Nawab Jubbar Khan, brother of the Amir and a noted friend of the English.

"To us it appears," said he, "that your Government sets too high a value on offers of friendship which ensure to Afghans no protection from hostility aroused by our refusing all intercourse with other nations. You, who are just, consider, is it justice that friends shall give service each to each, not merely one to the other?" And again Burnes, of the fluent tongue and pen, had no word for answer.

On the 21st Dōst Mahomed himself dispatched a final appeal, couched in language approaching humility. He, the Amir-i-Kabir—whose fulsome greeting to Lord Auckland was still fresh in the memory of both—now begged only two words of encouragement. "Let his Lordship recognize me as Amir of Kabul," was his plea, "and I will forget the mortal feud between me and Shah Kamrān, my enemy by blood. I will rush to his support with my

best troops—on the simple condition of receiving a subsidy for troops I shall employ in the Company's service." For the present he would not say another word about the restoration of Peshawur. Unpalatable language for the chief of an arrogant race. But it availed him nothing. Because he would not fling himself, unconditionally, into an embrace that offered no protection, he was written down a "hostile chief, harbouring schemes of aggrandisement injurious to the security and peace of the frontiers of India." And at that time India's most northerly stations were Ludhiana and Ferozepore!

Before the middle of April Burnes knew that all was over. Judge, then, of his feelings when a few days later came Pottinger's letter dispatched on the 13th of March, together with Yar Mahomed's characteristic appeal.

"We have got no cash now to spend, which is a hard case. By the grace of God, if we could get some cash we would preserve Herāt . . . but in case we have no money it is impossible. Therefore I solicit the protection of the English. Friendship or animosity we will make with no Power but through the English Government. We will also abolish the system of slavery in this country." Worth noting, this last, in view of that which followed.

To the man who almost reckoned Herāt a frontier station of India this was ill news indeed. But help he had none to give, beyond a diplomatic letter of sympathy, and a consoling assurance that the "tale of woe" had been duly forwarded to the Gods of Olympus, whence practical help might possibly be forthcoming—when all was over! To Pottinger he wrote more frankly, confessing that anxiety for the fate of Herāt tempted him to transmit the necessary sum from his own funds and

risk the result. But in the end caution prevailed; since further censure might seriously injure his own prospects.

And nine days later—when all the valleys were musical with snow-fed streams and Kabul had donned her spring *sári*—wrought with all the blossoms of all the fruit trees of earth—the curtain fell on the prologue of the great blunder;—ay, and worse than blunder: a drama of injustice and indecision, of blood and terror, that culminated in the first serious reverse to British arms since Clive had laid the foundation stone of empire, eighty years before.

And Dōst Mahomed Khan?

To say that his conduct throughout had been entirely single-minded and straightforward would be to say he was no Afghan. Compared with Yar Mahomed, the tortuous, he was an angel of light: and it must be confessed that his sincere efforts to fall in with British demands contrast favourably with the behaviour of a Government that preached friendship and practically forced him into hostility!—a fact set forth, not without a touch of pathos and dignity, in his last letter to Burnes.

> "Mankind have no patience," he wrote, "without obtaining their objects; and as my hopes in your Government are gone, I will be forced to have recourse to other Governments. It will be for the protection of Afghanistan, to save our honour, and God forbid, not from any ill design towards the British. . . . The Afghans have done nothing wrong, that any one should blame them; nor have they received any injury from the English.
>
> "In making friends with any Government my object will be to save and enlarge Afghanistan; and

during these last seven months I have told you everything of note. You know the good and bad. Now I have consigned myself to God; and in this no Government can blame me. There is no more to say which is not said; and if you like to speak in person, or examine all the correspondence that passed between us, there is no objection. I am very much obliged to you for the trouble you took to come so far. I expected very much from your Government; and hoped for the protection and enlargement of Afghanistan. Now I am disappointed, which I attribute not to the ill favour of the English, but to my own bad fortune.

"Creatures must rely on the Creator."

The letter bears the stamp of sincerity; and unquestionably the Amir was justified of his actions. A small state, wedged between two rival Powers, he saw his country in danger of extinction except through alliance with one or the other. Great Britain would not: and Russia was on the spot, ready to snap up her leavings. What choice had the Amir? Russo-Persian promises were golden; but they did not rejoice his heart. He knew that their acceptance would injure him in the eyes of all good Sunni Mahomedans. He began to perceive, also, that they rested on a foundation of sand. The defence of Herāt had been prolonged beyond all expectation. How would it end?

Like the warning rumble of an earthquake came the fear that his new allies might be powerless to protect him after all. "A subaltern of the British Army, within the walls of Herāt, was setting them at defiance."

VI

But throughout April and May that resolute spirit of defiance grew increasingly hard to maintain. All too soon it became evident that Russia's Ambassador had arrived at the psychological moment. The unpaid troops were deserting in numbers. Supplies and ammunition were scarcer than ever, and the Shah himself had begun to lose heart: when lo! an unlooked-for saviour, from whose lips fell practical counsel, and from his hands golden encouragement, more potent still. Months of deferred pay, distributed among the soldiers, magically improved the temper of the army; and under Russian direction more effective batteries came speedily into being.

In fine, Count Simonich took over charge and conducted the siege: a state of affairs embarrassing as it was humiliating for Sir John McNeill. Yet, for a while, he held his ground, in the belief that his mere presence encouraged the Afghans: and, for a while, the Most Exalted enjoyed the importance of playing off one European Ambassador against another; while he noted, with satisfaction, how discontent and listlessness had vanished from his force like dew before the sun. Investment had become more stringent. Stray bodies of troops, scattered over the plain, had been drawn more closely round the walls; and, for the first time since their arrival, one competent brain controlled the movements of all. Russia's influence steadily increased, and that not only in the Persian camp.

Those within the city noted the changes also; but satis-

faction was far from them. Harassed and disheartened by privations, lack of funds and England's apparent inability to disperse their foes, the Afghans began asking themselves: Of what avail to fly in the face of *kismet*, to multiply miseries, if it were written that defeat must come? And, as April gave place to May, miseries multiplied exceedingly; while Nature, with sublime disregard of man's evanescent disasters, decked herself, like a vain girl, for her great spring festival in scarlet and purple, white and youngest green. For the time of tulips and thistles had come; and all the stony *dasht* of the foothills was glorified by splashes of regal colour, starred with the first golden blossoms of the low-growing wild rose. From each slenderest twig of the poplars bordering the river diaphanous leaves fluttered, like prisoned butterflies, in the sun. But orchards, fields and vineyards—where were they? Never a curling tendril nor fairy blade pierced the scarred and battered earth. Only, here and there, a group of fruit trees, not yet cut down for fuel, blossomed bravely as if in defiance of the sacrificial knife. Even within the city, wherever a tree or two was left standing, spring's light laugh flashed out in piteous contrast to ruined streets, blackened woodwork and the prevailing atmosphere of the charnel house that grew more insupportable from day to day. How should it be otherwise, when thousands of mortals—living, dying and dead—were cooped up in one square mile of space, with never a drain to mitigate the pestilential mingling of refuse with decaying masses of that which had once been man. Even to the hardened Afghan such a state of things seemed far from pleasant; and to the sensitive nostrils of the British subaltern how much more so.

But a siege is not a garden-party. A man must endure, as best he may, its inevitable ills; and increasing activity

without kept Pottinger more constantly than ever with Yar Mahomed on the works.

In any case there was little to be done, and that little his good friend the Hakeem could be trusted to do with his might. In him, at least, the isolated European had found a kindred spirit, honestly zealous to serve his kind. Wherever sickness or suffering could be alleviated, there he would surely be found. But the calamity no man could alleviate increased daily: too little food and too many useless mouths that craved it. Bullets might slay their fifties; but fever, famine and scurvy now began to slay their hundreds. Grain grew scarcer daily, and horses replaced the lack of sheep—horses not paid for in money, but in superfluous humans, whose value was far less. Four or five of these would be given, readily, in exchange for one soulless beast convertible into food for fighting men.

Each day the unseen enemy waxed in power, and each day brought word of the waning influence of McNeill. It was at this time that Eldred Pottinger first noted a change in the bearing of the chiefs, with whom he foregathered every evening in the Wazir's hall of audience; a forced note in their frankness and good-fellowship; an evident discomfiture under the British directness of his look and tone.

The significance of tokens so unwelcome was all too plain: and upon the 23rd of May he arrived, at the usual hour, to find his supposed allies eagerly debating the immediate despatch of an envoy to the Russian Ambassador, acknowledging Herāt's dependence on that power alone. It seemed that the King's European physician had been fostering the idea, for even as Pottinger entered Hājee Ferōz was airing M. Euler's views on the question of the moment.

"From the store of his knowledge he hath assured me, brethren, that if such a step be taken Irān will fight no more, neither have the English power to interfere."

"*Shahbash!* Well spoken! Let an envoy be despatched at dawn," was the general shout—then silence, for there stood suddenly in the midst of them a boy of six-and-twenty, whose influence had gone steadily from strength to strength, based as it was on their unbounded admiration for courage and a half-puzzled respect for the man who invariably spoke truth, at whatever disadvantage to himself.

The awkward silence lasted a minute or two. Pottinger had not suffered so unpleasant a shock since the day when Yar Mahomed refused him leave to depart. But his face gave no hint of the fact, and he was the first to speak.

Without heat, yet without a shadow of indecision, he rebuked them for a change of front unwarranted as yet; bade them at least pause before committing themselves, if only in view of that urgent appeal sent to the Governor-General direct.

"And how long would you have us wait, Pottinger Sahib?" demanded a chief of pugnacious character, "for an answer that may never be vouchsafed to us? What assurance have we, except that while waiting our men are slain, our women and children die of pestilence and famine?"

Pottinger fronted the speaker squarely. "A hard case, Sirdar Sahib. But war is not child's play at any time; and, having asked for help from India, at least allow time for help to arrive."

"But McNeill Sahib——"

"Be assured McNeill Sahib is doing his utmost on your behalf. Consider also that to acknowledge Russian pro-

tection is to sacrifice the independence of Herāt, which the Government of India desires, at all costs, to preserve. Whatever can be done for your benefit my Government will do. Only have patience a little longer, seeing how difficult is the task in hand."

His quiet bearing and placable speech were not without effect. The Afghans, though heartily sick of delay, recognized the wisdom of his plea. Further, the power of Russia, as of England, was a vague far-off abstraction; but the power of this one man was present and concrete; his good-will proven tenfold by word and deed.

After much long-winded argument they consented to wait; and Pottinger, relieved for the moment, returned to his quarters. The incident dismayed him more than he would have cared to own had any one been by with whom he might take counsel in this fresh emergency. But none was by; and no word came from McNeill, nor any letter from Burnes. He himself began to feel doubtful of the issue; doubtful how far he dared make promises in the name of his Government, accredited agent though he was. Yet by no other means could he hope to combat this new, insidious evil at the core of things.

Night brought more of anxious thought than of sleep. Six months of hardship and incessant effort had told upon his health; and with the first spell of Herāt's rainless summer heat, his old friend fever had returned to bear him company. Of late his string bed had been moved up on to the open house roof; and for a long while he lay wide-eyed—poised as it were between earth and the stars—wondering greatly what the next few weeks would bring to pass. From below arose fitful voices and footsteps of those who courted darkness because their deeds were evil; the cry of them that suffered unspeakable things; the noisome breath of putrescence from burial

pits and foul blind alleys, breeding-grounds of pestilence to come. While above, unnumbered leagues above the discord of Persian and Afghan, Russian and English—above the lonely, wakeful subaltern on his string bed—wheeled the unperturbed, inexorable battalions of the stars. And beyond these, again, this boy of early Victorian training and beliefs discerned the just, unsleeping governance of God.

In the strength of that beholding he thrust aside anxiety and doubt; slept sound, woke early, and hurried to his post upon the works.

The minister greeted him jovially; good news in his eyes. "How great was your wisdom, my friend, in curbing the wild horses of impatience with the silken rein of good counsel! Lo, this morning it is rumoured that McNeill Sahib is indeed working actively on our behalf: having assured the Most Exalted that if Herāt should fall into his hands it will be retaken again by a British army. To-day, also, Major Todd Sahib hath been sent to make arrangements with the *Burra Lāt* himself for sustenance of our people when the siege is at an end. Without doubt there is no better friend of the Afghans than your Government; no power in Asia like the power of Great Britain!"

And so said every chief among them all, even they who had shouted loudest in favour of Russia the night before. Pottinger's brow cleared: and the word of hope sped, flame-like, through the city, rousing men to renewed activity and zeal.

But the welcome reaction proved a flash in the pan. Too soon it transpired that Britain's good intentions had been overstated and the rising mercury fell again to zero. The counsel of Pottinger seemed no longer wisdom, but a

snare into which the chiefs had foolishly fallen. Never again should a Feringhi over-persuade them. They alone would make their final decrees.

Throughout the next few days meetings were many and ineffectual: for long privation, and seemingly futile resistance, had unsteadied the balance even of the shrewdest. And as the wind blew east or west, so their bearing toward Pottinger veered between open discourtesy and respect. But such was the impression made by his pluck and energy throughout the siege that, whatever the quarter of the wind, he was present always, as a matter of course. "Notwithstanding," it is written in his journal, "that I might have been considered a doubtful friend, it was never contemplated that I should be kept out of their assemblies."

At times he would be listened to as one in authority; at times rudely shouted down. In either case he met their shifting moods with an unchanging front. "A man of temper and firmness . . . the whole assembly might be against him, he was not to be overawed." And in dealing with Asiatics, moral courage of this quality has a value all its own.

But beneath his mask of unconcern lurked increasing doubt and anxiety not easy to ignore. The silence of Sir John McNeill grew daily more ominous; the shifting winds of favour and disfavour harder to be endured. On the 27th the arrival of Burnes' disheartening reply gave pretext sufficient for action, and Pottinger boldly demanded a private audience of Yar Mahomed Khan.

Intimate speech between these sometime inseparables had been infrequent of late; and Pottinger felt by no means certain how a show of remonstrance *plus* ill-tidings would be received. The suavity of Yar Mahomed's greeting signified nothing one way or the other.

"Good news at last, my friend, from the British camp?" said he.

And Pottinger, regarding him steadily: "No. Such news as I have is from Kabul——"

"Ah ha! Money? Troops?"

"Neither—as yet. Captain Burnes has no more power in such a matter than I myself. But he has sent on your appeal, with strong recommendation, to the Governor-General."

Yar Mahomed considered that statement while pensively caressing his beard.

"Your *Burra Lāt* is a great man and a good. But our need is urgent, and Calcutta is two thousand miles distant: Tehran less than a thousand. What is your thought? *Will* troops or money be sent?"

Pottinger hesitated. The other's tone implied that much hung on his answer; and he knew the wishes of his Government, if not its intentions. He decided to take the risk.

"I think only of money," said he. "And I have little doubt that it will be given to make good the total loss of crops and revenue arising from our long defence. But," he added slowly and with emphasis, "such help would only be forthcoming upon certain conditions, and on these conditions I must insist if you have any further desire for my services on your behalf."

"You have but to name them," quoth the suave one, his bold eyes gleaming at the prospect of treasure. "Save for your services where would Herāt be at this moment?"

Pottinger smiled, not ill pleased. "Very much where it is now, no doubt. But, if you think otherwise, so much the better for my conditions! They are two: Shah Kamrān must never submit to be called a servant

of Persia; nor must he on any account admit the interference of Russia in his concerns."

Now it was Yar Mahomed who smiled in quite another fashion.

"You are moderate, my friend! You know how to draw the teeth of an enemy."

"I have not attended your assemblies this week with cotton wool in mine ears. If the British Ambassador knew of your recent conduct, he would probably have no more to say to you. But now for my conditions. You consent?"

"What else? Money we must have; and as for our independence, neither I nor the Shah would ever yield it except under severest pressure. Nevertheless, with your sanction I will write once more undertaking to suppress slavery and make the Sunni Hazāras serve Persia, if Ghoriān and my brother be restored, and an order given for five or six thousand *kurwars* of grain. A fair bargain, O friend of the Afghans?"

"A fair bargain. Let it be at once set down."

That night Pottinger slept long and soundly, pillowed on the satisfaction of having achieved a good day's work. Next morning the letter was despatched, and on the evening of the 29th came the long-looked-for note from Sir John McNeill.

Rumours had not been promising of late. But youth is nothing if not sanguine, and Pottinger eagerly broke the seal; then—for a long minute stood very still, as is the way of strong natures under a shock.

McNeill wrote that his relations with the Shah had of late become more strained than ever; that political complications were many, and his position bristled with difficulties of uncertain outcome. Finally—and it was this last that had stricken Pottinger motionless—he impressed

on his young assistant to refrain from making any sort of promise in the name of Government, since he himself had just received warning to that effect.

It was the Kabul policy over again. Friendship to be sustained on a lean diet of sympathy: and only the man on the spot knows how hopeless is the task. In Pottinger's case there was clearly nothing for it but a frank confession that he had exceeded his instructions, and that no certain help from India could be reckoned on. What the result to himself might be he could by no means foretell. But in the larger issues between nation and nation, the fate of individuals counts for nothing at all.

It was the time of evening assembly; and Pottinger's duty, however unpalatable, lay clear before him. With a muttered oath he pulled himself together and went straightway to the Takt-i-pul.

His star had risen high in the past two days, and the chiefs gave him jovial greeting, the which he acknowledged with a courteous gesture. But the change in his bearing was apparent to all. Deliberately, though not without a secret sinking of the heart, he made his way toward Yar Mahomed Khan, and, ignoring a mute invitation to be seated, spoke so that every man might hear—

"Wazir Sahib, I have that to say which is no less unpleasant for myself than for you."

The minister started; the buzz of talk dropped to a disconcerting stillness. Only Pottinger's deep-toned voice went on—

"Two days ago, in my great desire to give what help and hope I could to your suffering city, I spoke with assurance of money for yourself and sustenance for your people from the Indian Government. To-day I am obliged to tell you straightly that I exceeded my powers. I am advised by Sir John McNeill to make no promises

that the Governor-General may find himself unable or unwilling to carry out."

For a full minute the stillness held. Then the storm broke—as Pottinger had known it must—in a general clamour; a fierce outburst of invective against himself, against McNeill and the entire British nation, that thrust upon harmless folk agents without authority, caring nothing if good came of it or ill.

Among the more turbulent were cries of "Turn out the infidel!" "May God roast him and his!" "What further use is he now?" And thereat the pugnacious chief, who had opposed Pottinger on the 23rd, took up the tale.

"Use? Nay, hath he not harmed us rather? Dissuading us, for his own ends, from an alliance we would have made good a week ago, and coming to us now with his lame story of 'exceeded powers'——"

"Not too late, brother, even now," broke in one who sat near. "The grey-coats are without the gates, and it is said that their friendship with the Shah increaseth daily."

This suggestion turned the torrent of the talk into another channel; and for a space Eldred Pottinger stood silent, seemingly unmoved, while fresh schemes for a Russian alliance were vociferously discussed.

Then, turning to the Wazir, he made his voice heard again above the tumult.

"In spite of all, Wazir Sahib, I have the right to ask one question. Am I to be insulted without a fair hearing, or shall I go forth of your assembly—*not* to return?"

That last made Yar Mahomed give pause. For he knew his man.

"Silence, brothers, silence!" he shouted, and was

obeyed. "Shall we altogether forget, in our anger and bitterness of heart, that Pottinger Sahib hath fought with us, suffered with us and eaten our salt these many months. Let him be heard."

Among Afghans an appeal to the claim of "salt" is rarely made in vain, and the Wazir's "Let him be heard" was echoed, none too graciously, here and there.

"Speak on, then, Pottinger Sahib," said he. "Though I see not that much remains to be said."

"On mine own behalf—this much," the other answered quietly. "That it is scant justice to abuse a man as if he were an enemy because he speaks truth. Can any of you believe that I spoke lightly words so bitter to your ears? How much easier had it been to keep silence, leaving you in a Paradise of fools? My zeal for your interests need scarcely be spoken of. But have I more power to disobey the British minister than you yourselves to disobey the Shah? It may be that he is over-cautious, because of difficulties in camp; and I can only advise that I should write once again, showing him openly the great disappointment in your hearts. By this means it is possible we may induce him to countenance my given promise of help. Is it well spoken?"

"Manfully spoken." "*Shahbash*, Pottinger Sahib!" "It is English friendship we desire above all!"

The change of tone was manifest: and Pottinger, once more relieved, went with Yar Mahomed to his quarters, where between them they laid their desperate case before Sir John McNeill.

VII

One mercy, at least, was accorded them. They were not kept long in suspense. All too soon came word from Sir John McNeill that his influence in the Persian camp was practically at an end, and that the open disrespect shown to the British nation, in his person, would make departure imperative before many days were over.

Here was news to dismay the stoutest; and Pottinger, as he read, saw plainly that now, in effect, the fate of Herāt hung upon his own exertions, his own power to uphold the wavering manhood of the Afghans even in the face of British retreat. The thing must be done: therefore it could be done. That was his simple rule of life; and, happily for him, the bearer of McNeill's disheartening note brought news of an impending attack, more vigorous, more concerted than any attempted as yet. Such news would give the colour of cowardice to any talk of negotiations before the event. A point worth emphasizing, nor was it emphasized in vain. Afghan pride and bravado, though beginning to wear thin, could still be galvanized into a fair show of life; and independence, at any price, was the mood of the moment. Let the Persian dogs do their worst! They could never scale the ramparts or occupy the *fausse-braie*. Let them come on!

None the less it was with secret misgivings that they watched the British camp fall to pieces, tent by tent, till nothing remained of it but a party of horsemen and transport mules trailing leisurely northward into the dusty heart of the horizon. The most ignorant knew the

meaning of that unwelcome departure. England's alliance with Persia was at an end.

This was on June the 7th; and on the 13th came the first taste of renewed hostilities. A deserter from the city had basely made it known that, during the midday hours, even the defence of the *fausse-braie* was neglected in favour of rest: and behold, half-a-dozen sleepy Afghans suddenly confronted with a Persian storming party in full force.

"Allah—Allah! *Wah-illa-ullāha-o!*" The name of God rang out from a score of throats, and the crackle of devil's laughter from a score of muskets. But the sleepy half-dozen stood firm in the narrow traverses, till the clamour brought a relieving party to their aid. Thus reinforced, they sprang boldly over the parapets, and rushing headlong down the outer slope, repulsed the Persians with heavy loss.

The effect of this slight incident was magical. In spite of British desertion, it seemed that the *kismet* of the Afghans still held good. Despondency evaporated. The lively flame of hope leaped high. But it was a little flame and lean; pitifully sensitive to adverse breezes. And in the week of activity that followed, the besiegers displayed a mind-directed energy conspicuously absent hitherto. Breaches yawned wide and wider. The wet ditch was filled up at many points, and at others spanned with light practical bridges. Worse than all, under the guidance of Russian officers the dread mining operations were renewed with such skill and persistence as a worn-out garrison could not hope to match. Buffeted thus, the little flame died down; and despondency uprose again, like a noxious miasma, stupefying the will and courage of all. Even the stalwart bearing of Yar Mahomed Khan

had suffered a change that augured ill for the fate of Herāt.

Yet there remained one soldier among them whose courage was above proof.

In these days of threatened collapse, when the whole head was sick and the whole heart faint, Eldred Pottinger did but exert himself the more unsparingly; and his recognized position went far to strengthen his hand. That none thanked him goes without saying. Many abused him, rather, for having dissuaded them from a compact that might, then, have been entered into without imputation of cowardly surrender. Then they might have won the support of Russia's powerful arm. Now they would be crushed beneath her heel. Useless to attempt response or argument. He could only work on; patching up the battered defences; animating by his presence and example the half-starved, ill-paid soldiers; trusting that in due time his chance might come to answer, with deeds, the thankless ones for whom he wrought. And in due time it came—to him who knew better than most men how to wait.

The 22nd brought news of an impending assault upon all five gates at once; significant news to Pottinger, who had realized, long since, that an attack on these lines constituted their only grave danger. Well planned and vigorously executed, it could scarcely fail; the Afghans being too few and faint-hearted to hold four miles of wall against more than three times their number.

But no man of Pottinger's calibre seriously anticipates defeat. By prompt and effective preparations the dispirited garrison might yet be roused to make a resolute resistance: that was his dominant thought. He discussed it with his friend Deen Mahomed while making his daily

round of the works, and the big Afghan listened, pensively nodding his head.

"Wise counsel, Sahib," said he. "But will it find favour with the Wazir? Your honour hath seen how, of late, he goeth like one without hope. And when the leader loseth hope, it is as if to fling wide the gates and bid the enemy walk in."

"That shall never happen, my friend, while *I* am in this city," the Englishman asserted, with such quiet confidence that the Asiatic felt his own revive.

"The Sahib hath heart and courage enough for a whole regiment! Wherefore his word carrieth weight—even with the Wazir. May it prevail!"

But upon this most critical occasion it did not prevail. An apathy, almost incredible, seemed to have fallen upon the hitherto strong and resourceful Yar Mahomed Khan. Whether he foresaw defeat, and was at his old trick of safeguarding himself against the wrath of Persia, who shall say? The fact remains that neither advice nor entreaty could move him, nor any report, however circumstantial, convince him of danger at hand.

"All things are written," was his unanswerable conclusion. "In my belief, they come not. But if they come—it will be seen. The man who strives against *kismet* is a madman and a fool."

For all that, the madman and fool did what he could; and thanks to his energy, the guards at all points were at least in readiness when day dawned upon the 24th of June.

The Persians, as usual, could not resist an opening display of fireworks. Then silence—a long silence; while sentries upon walls and towers saw plainly that five distinct bodies of troops were advancing, in order, to the five gateways of Herāt. Yet the Wazir, seemingly un-

troubled, sat in his quarters, and the garrison, as was natural, followed his lead. Overpowered with heat and faint from semi-starvation, many of them had even settled down to their midday sleep.

Then, of a sudden, silence and false security were shattered by a rocket overhead. Boom—boom—from the south. And again, boom, boom, from the west. North and east returned an answering challenge; and from all sides at once came an angry crackle of musketry.

Doubt was no longer possible. The threatened assault had begun.

Everywhere men sprang up in alarm, shook off drowsiness and seized their weapons. Roused at last, Yar Mahomed hurried out of his quarters to the nearest point of attack. Pottinger himself stayed only to impress on Allah Dad Khan certain instructions to be carried out should he fall in the city's defence; then—all eagerness for action—made haste to join the Wazir. Him he found by the Kandahar gate—whence the enemy had already been repulsed—thundering out orders to the confused chiefs that they should join him forthwith in defence of the breach near the south-east angle. But the chiefs, unready as the rest, were too slow for his newly-born impatience and alarm.

"Come on, Pottinger Sahib," he cried at sight of his British ally. "While we halt for these laggards the Persians will be through the walls."

But now it was the truer soldier who counselled delay. "Small use, Wazir Sahib, to go lamely forward with a mere escort! A bold advance in force is our one chance against so determined an assault."

But on that critical day Yar Mahomed seems to have lost his balance beyond recall. Deaf to reason, he and his handful of men straggled up towards the *fausse-braie*

more like a party of curious idlers, than soldiers eager to repel invasion. And Pottinger, cursing the change that had come upon the man, could but go with them, resolved at heart to save the city if might be, in spite of herself.

For the struggle at the south-east angle, though brief, had been fiercer by far than the rest. At every other point the Persians had either been repulsed or failed in their advance. But here, in the first resolute rush, the lower *fausse-braie* had been carried, its Afghan defenders falling at their posts to a man; then the storming party, with yells of triumph, had clambered on up the slope—undeterred by brisk, irregular firing—till the higher trench was reached.

Another struggle here, more stubborn and deadly than the one below. But the Afghans were hopelessly outnumbered. No matter how many Persians might fall, others rushed like water into a vacuum, filling up the gaps. As well might straws resist the rising tide. They were up; they swarmed like ants over the parapets and through the narrow traverses. Checked for a space by the shock of a gallant resistance, they flung themselves at last into the trench—and the upper *fausse-braie*, the Afghans' impregnable rock of defence, was gone.

Still no advent of reserves; no sign from the city of troops coming to their support. The foremost assailants, yelling like devils on the track of a lost soul, had almost gained the breach itself. Then, of a sudden, came answering yells from within; and the yawning gap was closed against intruders by Deen Mahomed with the Afghan reserve.

Shouts of triumph were checked on the lips by a storm of lead. Afghan knives flashed here and there, achieving deathly work. The daring "forwards" were driven with slaughter out of the breach. But the *fausse-*

braie overflowed with others eager to take their place. Twice they swarmed up again, and twice were flung backward in confusion; living, dying and dead. Yet a third time they returned, their number seemingly undiminished; and at that Deen Mahomed's little band, despairing of support, began to waver. Quietly, surreptitiously, those behind slipped away; some openly deserting, some feigning a concern for the wounded rare enough amongst their kind; while the Persians pressed forward with hope renewed.

Then it was that Yar Mahomed and his straggling escort drew near the gate of slaughter. They saw their men covertly retreating: heard the uproar swell louder: Persian yells of triumph telling their own tale. Almost the day seemed lost: almost—but not quite. Persia had at least one man to reckon with before she could set foot in Herāt.

For Eldred Pottinger sprang forward, checking the deserters with scathing speech and shouting to the escort behind: "Close up, men, and come on. It is not yet too late to save the city."

But sights and sounds that fired the British subaltern seemed to paralyze the Afghan Sirdar. Instead of confirming Pottinger's order he hesitated, stood still, and finally sat down upon a ruined wall, gloomily wagging his head. Amazed and indignant, Pottinger swung round on his heel. "What ails you now, Wazir Sahib?" cried he. "Bestir yourself and play the man, or all will be lost indeed."

He spoke as to one stunned. "No use, my friend," the Wazir answered sullenly. "How shall a handful of half-starved men make stand against four times their number? All things are written; and if Allah fighteth for the Persians who can hinder them?"

"*I* can—if none else will!" retorted Eldred Pottinger, his eyes ablaze with scorn. "And you can also, will you but shake off this devil of despondency. Go forward, even with this small remnant, to hearten those who are coward-like retreating. Or at least send your son and return yourself to hasten the chiefs. Shall it be written in the page of history that Yar Mahomed Khan, through sheer cowardice, lose Herāt?"

That dread word stung the man to action, if to nothing more.

"None hath ever called *me* coward, Pottinger Sahib, nor shall!" he cried out angrily; and springing to his feet, gave orders that his son return to hasten the chiefs, while he pushed on to encourage the garrison.

But the nearer they drew, the more desperate seemed the case. The Persians were pressing their advantage to the utmost, though as yet they had not set foot within the breach.

"Smite, brothers, in the name of Allah! Smite and slay!" the Wazir shouted desperately.

But his voice lacked its wonted ring of command. No answering shout gave him welcome, and the few who rallied half-heartedly were thrust back by those in front. At that Yar Mahomed's spurious flicker of energy died out. Instead of forcing his way boldly into the *mêlée* he stood still again, sullen and despondent as before.

"*Now* you can see for yourself, Pottinger Sahib. Without fresh aid they can do nothing. Better go back for it at once. Through too much privation these men have not the hearts of mice in their great bodies."

"They have hearts ten times more manly than your own!" Pottinger retorted hotly, not staying to pick his words. "The gap being narrow, they only need determined support to hold their own against an army. But

if *you* turn back, they, not knowing the reason, will follow like sheep—and who shall blame them?"

But Yar Mahomed had turned already, and Pottinger must needs keep pace with him to enforce his argument, justified as it was by the prompt retreat of those who had rallied at their coming.

"Behold whether I speak truth," he went on eagerly; then, halting, turned upon those who followed; and, the space being narrow, he and a few others forcibly drove them back. "Now then, Wazir Sahib, you have seen," he urged, undismayed. "Have you resisted so long, only to sit down like a weakling when the real crisis comes? Will you not also return? *You*—that should not follow, but lead!"

Startled by the dire effect of his move, Yar Mahomed stood still. "And having returned," he asked lamely, "what remaineth to be done?"

As if in answer came the rush of hurrying feet from the city—a Sultan with fifty men.

"*This* much remains," Pottinger answered decisively, as the troops came up. "Let the Sultan and his men make haste to gain the lower *fausse-braie*, and pushing swiftly along, take the storming party in flank; whilst we, at the same moment, force our remnant here to make one more assault down the breach. You agree?"

"Yes—yes. Do as you will," the Afghan made answer without enthusiasm. He waved a commanding hand to the new-comers. "Go at once and carry out the Sahib's instructions."

The Sultan, with admirable promptitude, turned to obey, while the Wazir sat on, looking after him with a clouded brow.

At that Eldred Pottinger came near to despair. What possessed the man, on this day of all others, was more

than he could conceive. But the minutes were grains of gold, not to be squandered in speculation; and shaking the Afghan by the shoulder as one shakes a sleeper, Pottinger cried out desperately, "Sirdar Sahib, rouse yourself for God's sake and the honour of your country. Are you mad that you sit inert at so perilous a juncture?"

Yar Mahomed, scowling, shook his head. "It is *you* that are mad, rather. The plan is a good one, but we are too few. Allah hath strengthened the arm of the Persian, and no man can fight against God."

"*Bismillah!* Use not the sacred name to whitewash your despicable soul," the Englishman thundered, giving rein at last to the anger that consumed him. Entreaty being useless, he lashed the man's thick hide with an outburst of scathing Afghan abuse, till a fresh onslaught at the breach drowned his voice. Then, seizing Yar Mahomed by the wrist, he fairly dragged him to his feet.

"By God, you white-livered tyrant—you *shall* come on! Die if you must. But at least die like a man!"

Still grasping his amazed and thoroughly awakened ally, he rushed onward, shouting encouragement to those ahead and calling to those behind, who, with one accord, followed his impetuous lead.

Yar Mahomed caught fire at last. Wrenching himself free, he snatched up a heavy stick and rushed upon the hindmost, laying about him blindly with the full force of his arm. Laggards and deserters, cramped up in the narrow space, had no choice but to flee before him. Some in their terror over-leapt the parapets and fled wildly down the outer slope, others were forced into the midst of the defenders at the breach, Pottinger and Yar Mahomed following close upon their heels—not one moment too soon.

A great cry went up: "They come—they come! Herāt is saved!"

And, impelled from within, the whole body rushed violently forward, driving back the startled Persians as though an army were upon their heels.

At that same moment the Sultan's flank movement, along the lower trench, turned passing discomfiture into sheer panic. Fresh troops from the late-awakened city came pouring into the breach. The assailants fled pell-mell, tumbling one over another in their eagerness to be gone; and Herāt was saved indeed—saved, under God, by the gallantry and spirit of that little-recognized builder of Empire—the British subaltern.

VIII

Some two weeks later, Eldred Pottinger sat alone in his private corner of the Hakeem's house: a mud box of a room, but at least entirely his own. And to realize the unspeakable blessedness of those three words, a man needs to have spent months in the wayside mosques and *serâis* of Afghanistan, eating and sleeping cheek by jowl with vermin-ridden Moslems, to whom soap is a superfluity and a hair-brush unknown. Here, indeed, soap—superfluous or no—was past hoping for; and one solitary tin plate served him for all meals, that had grown scant and scantier as the summer wore on. But some measure of cleanliness he could and did manage to achieve, more especially since the arrival of Allah Dad Khan, who served him stupidly yet faithfully throughout his long, eventful sojourn at Herāt.

One unglazed window looked upon an inner courtyard, white-hot with afternoon sunshine, and admitted such pestilent air as Herāt could boast on the 9th of July in that unforgettable summer of '38. Furniture there was none save the chair he sat on—its vanished cane seat supplied by the lid of a case—and a ricketty deal table, steadied for writing by wads of paper.

That table held the greater part of his belongings, neatly set out: hair-brushes, sextant, Bible, Elphinstone's *Kabul*, and the slim, mottled native books wherein he kept a daily account of the siege that, for all the success of his crowning effort, was not by any means at an end.

In this sacred hour of siesta the whole exhausted city

lay inert as at midnight under the pitiless blaze of noon. Only flies and wasps, in their millions, were ceaselessly astir, teasing the sleepers and swarming unrebuked over the dead; while the hot wind of July blew fitfully, filling the air with poisonous powder of dust. Between flies and the fire of intermittent fever, Pottinger had given up the futile attempt at sleep, and now sat at his table, bare-headed, in loose shirt and trousers, thoughtfully re-reading his detailed but unadorned entry for the 24th of June.

Seven months of severe privation, of imprisonment within one overcrowded, insanitary, square mile of space, had graven new lines upon the strong, young face, which looked years older than on the day he set out from Kutch. The healthy red-brown of the skin was gone. Eye sockets and cheek bones showed too painfully clear, and anxious thought had scored a deep furrow between his brows. That furrow deepened as he read. Something in his simple record of the day's events seemed to dissatisfy him. His entry, as it stood, was bald enough in all conscience. But the recurrent letter "I" jarred on the innate modesty of the man: a modesty so rare, in such a case, that it would scarce be credited were it not proven by the work of his own hand.

When Sir John Kaye, twenty years later, compiled, from this same journal, the history of the siege, he testified that wherever Pottinger had originally written "I" he had erased the egotistical letter and so altered the wording, that only by giving rein to a curiosity, pardonable enough in the circumstances, was Sir John able to extract the real history of Pottinger's achievements on that memorable 24th of June. What men thought of them without the walls, and how swiftly the tale of them passed from lip to lip, had been proven within two days of the event: when a stranger from

Karack—some thirty miles off—had prostrated himself before "the saviour of Herāt," effusively kissing his hands and crying: "Praise be to Allah, who hath permitted me to make so great a pilgrimage!"

But fame, like any other gift of the gods, is bought with a price, and Pottinger soon saw that his enhanced reputation as a warrior had been gained at the expense of a popularity he could ill afford to lose.

True, by sheer dash and determination he had saved the city and carried the day. But victory, achieved in the teeth of failure, wrought no exultation in those who knew that nothing short of a miracle could enable them to withstand another assault of the same character. Letters found on the body of a Persian general proved the whole design to be the work of Russian officers; and the Persians, though dispirited for the nonce, had resources to make good their loss. The resources of Herāt were at an end. Citizens could not be fed. Soldiers could not be paid. "The bearing of the Afghans was that of men who had sustained a crushing defeat. . . . Yar Mahomed, long after all danger was past, moved about as one confused and bewildered. . . . The loss on both sides had been severe, and a week of inaction supervened." Even when, at length, the garrison set about repairing the damage done, it was but too clear that they lacked heart, as their leaders lacked spirit.

To preserve a resolute temper and balanced judgment in an atmosphere so crestfallen, so befogged with gloom, was almost beyond human power: and Pottinger had deep-seated reasons for the heart-searchings and anxieties that crowded into his brain as he sat revising his journal in the stifling stillness of that July afternoon. Not only were the difficulties of his own position increased; but the

torments of the people were pitiful beyond telling. Mere death from starvation was the least of their ills. Wherever money or jewels might conceivably exist thither went the soldiers of Yar Mahomed Khan, leaving in their wake racked bodies, terror-smitten minds, and too often ruined homes.

To Pottinger's sensitive soul the horror of it all culminated in the consciousness that, but for him, the interminable struggle would have been over two weeks ago. By his very impulse of heroism he knew himself indirectly responsible for a reign of terror it sickened him to see. And others knew it also: nor troubled to conceal the fact. Many reproached him openly; the despairing looks and gaunt figures of others reproached him more painfully still, intensifying the hidden struggle between the soldier and man.

Yet what else was there to be done? The unanswerable question repeated itself a dozen times a day, with the maddening iteration of a clock striking the hours. As British officer and political agent his duty was clear; but the great pitiful heart of him revolted fiercely against its inevitable result.

In the light of fuller knowledge it is easy to belittle the whole affair: to question the importance of the issues at stake. But Pottinger, prisoned between four walls of a blockaded town, could not know that the importance of checking Russo-Persian aggression had been inflated by statesmen and politicians, scared out of their wits by the bogey of imminent invasion. He only knew, from Burnes and Stoddart, that the fall of Herāt would be looked on as a grave disaster, a possible prelude to war. In the light of that knowledge he acted, and in that light his actions must be judged.

The very fact that McNeill had retired, discomfited,

seemed to make a strong stand the more incumbent on himself: sole representative as he was of British interests and British prestige in that unlovely corner of earth. Nor did he swerve from his resolve to uphold both in the face of any odds: though at this time a sense of helplessness, of utter isolation, shadowed his sanguine soul as never yet. For all practical purposes the world had shrunk to one plague-spot of disease and torment within four battered walls: its horizon the outermost pickets of the Persian army; its supreme problem how to obtain money and food for hapless thousands destitute of both. In three months no word had reached him from his own people, any of whom might, for all he knew, be dead and buried; and indeed, for all they knew, a like fate might have been his. As for Lord Auckland's answer to that appeal, writ in the far-off beginning of things, it might be endlessly delayed in transit, if indeed it had not long since been intercepted: a far more likely event.

"Sahib, is your honour at leisure?"

It was the voice of Allah Dad Khan, devoted watch-dog, zealous to shield his master from unauthorized interruption.

At the Sahib's bidding he entered and announced the head of the Jews. These, no less than the Shiahs, had suffered cruelly at the hands of the Wazir. Only three days ago Pottinger had interfered to save their synagogue from being hacked down for fuel; and now, behold his penalty! Like most of his race, nothing disconcerted him more than being thanked for his services, save the awkward duty of thanking another. But courtesy forbade dismissal: and, as it chanced, the old Rabbi's honest emotion put self-consciousness to flight.

Without word of formal greeting he prostrated himself, muttered inaudible blessings, and with trembling

hands pressed a corner of the Christian's cloak to his lips.

Pottinger, deeply moved, raised him up and rebuked him in all gentleness, saying: "My friend, I am neither king nor deity that you should kneel to me. Nor is there need of thanks. Enough for me that I was permitted to save the house of God from sacrilege. Be seated, till Allah Dad Khan shall bring us tea."

The Rabbi obeyed, squatting cross-legged on the shabby cushion whereon Pottinger had vainly courted sleep; and the two were soon deep in talk upon the one eternal subject, fertile, yet profitless as the pouring of water into a sieve.

But even while the Afghan set before them *chupattis* and steaming bowls of a grey, tasteless liquid, came the sound of flying footsteps, and a gaunt ghost of a man flung himself, without ceremony, into the room. Stumbling in his haste he fell forward, his arms clasped close about a bundle hid beneath his draperies. But before Allah Dad Khan could remonstrate in language befitting the intrusion, he was up again and the bundle rolled with a clink to Pottinger's feet.

"Protector of the poor, forgive and save!" its owner entreated, skeleton hands set palm to palm. "Therein is this slave's remnant of ducats and of jewels. All else hath been wrested from me by the torments of hell. And when they return again"—a shudder convulsed him—"how shall I withstand them, weak as I am for lack of food? Here only, into your Honour's house, they dare not intrude. Hide them, Sahib—oh, hide them! that when this handful of bones shall be flung with others into the pit, my house and my babes shall not be altogether at the mercy of the merciless. Your Honour will not refuse?"

For Pottinger's brow had grown stern, and sterner, with the progress of a too familiar tale. But if his exacting conscience harboured any shadow of doubt as to the justification, risk apart, of such constant connivance against authority, the note of terror in the man's last words must have swept it clean away.

"No, I do not refuse," he said quietly. "Rest assured your treasure will be safe in my keeping."

And the Herāti, unnerved by sheer relief, fell without warning into a sobbing heap on the ground.

Then Eldred Pottinger, gloom on his brow, and a great pity in his eyes, leaned down and laid a steadying hand upon that inconsiderable fragment of human misery, urging it to keep command of itself and play the man. Something in his tone seemed to touch a hidden spring. The Herāti struggled unsteadily to his feet and executed a profound salaam.

"Let not the protector of the poor and saviour of the helpless—whom Allah raise to the seat of power!—regard this slave as one altogether without courage. But naught hath passed my lips, save water, these three days; and too little food in the belly leaveth too little manhood in the heart. Moreover, last night . . . they came . . . to the house of my cousin, next mine own, and I heard all. Wellnigh an hour they strove with him, even until the life was wrenched from his body: and the death wail of his house continued until the morning. Then I, going forth, stumbled upon that which had been flung down like a dead dog upon the threshold: and I said in my heart, To-morrow at the dawn how shall it be with thee?"

Grey as death, he swayed and would again have fallen; but Pottinger, springing up swiftly, prevented him, and gently forcing him on to the chair, set before him his own untasted meal. Without a word the Herāti fell upon

the food, like a starving animal; and only when tea and *chupattis* were gone, to the last drop and crumb, did an acute attack of shame set in. He—unmentionable scum of the earth—had eaten the food of the most noble; food that was dearer than gold even in houses of the great! And although Pottinger abruptly cut him short, he was not to be withheld from saluting the foot of his saviour, on whom be honour and glory in the years to come.

Thereafter he vanished—a pitiful unit among hundreds of his kind; but not until the Rabbi had also taken his leave did the disapproving wrath of Allah Dad Khan break in thunder on his master's devoted head.

"May God roast the whining coward!" he cried out hotly. "Of what avail to waste our last spoonful of tea and flour upon a low-born, who already hath one foot in Hell? Allah alone knows where I am to procure the morrow's supply. *Hazúr*, if this madness of giving be not checked——"

But Pottinger, silencing him with an impatient gesture, held out the empty bowl and platter. "Better wash these than waste thine energy in fool's talk," said he, not unkindly. "Later on I go to the assembly, where no doubt tea will be served. In any case a man can live longer upon air than he is apt to believe. Now—go. I have need to be alone."

The Afghan could not choose but obey; and Pottinger, closing his journal—with its record of a seemingly futile achievement—sat on a long while, lost in thought, his aching head pressed between his hands.

The case of the hapless Herāti was but one of scores, more harrowing, more desperate, as he had too good reason to know. Scarce a day had passed of late without bringing him some such proof of the Wazir's inhuman methods of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Ladies of rank,

even those of the Shah's household, had been threatened. None were safe, none sacred in this terrible conjuncture. And this was the man with whom he, Eldred Pottinger, was constrained to work as a friend—this human devil for whom the words justice and mercy were sounds without sense. To unite with him against the common enemy without had been feasible enough. But now common humanity was forcing Pottinger into secret and often dangerous conflict with his formidable ally: and what would be the end of it all?

How far removed was his daily round in this noisome city, his daily contact with human nature in its most hideous aspect, from the rough but wholesome hardships of the Road, toward which he yearned almost as a woman toward her son.

If any good were like to come of it—if he could see any goal ahead! But of what avail had been his efforts and privations, or even his final achievement? And yet he must by some means stumble on, like a man walking in the dark, with only the hidden lantern of conscience to guide him over the rough ground, one step at a time; only the steadfast conviction that his thwarted purpose and all it involved were no interruption to God's providence; but rather an integral part of it to which he himself did not hold the key.

IX

An hour later Pottinger pulled himself together, combated the ache of emptiness in Asiatic fashion by tightening his *kummerbund*, and moistened his parched throat with a draft of lukewarm water. All hope of slaking thirst had been given up long ago. The nauseous fluid waked a mocking memory of iced brandy pegs and cool verandahs in the far-off, luxurious days that seemed almost to belong to another life; since there-out came no news, nor any word of greeting. Metaphorically he tightened also the belt about his heart, buckling it close with the stoic counsel of Achilles: "Let our sorrows rest in our hearts; for there is no profit in lamentation." Then he went forth, as usual, to the evening assembly of Yar Mahomed Khan.

There were times, as now, when he shrank from sight and touch of the man: yet, for the very people's sake—if for no weightier reason—the travesty of friendship must be played out. Go he must; but, in going, he devoutly hoped there might be no call to discuss matters intimate and confidential.

A vain hope: he knew it on the moment of arrival. There was purpose in Yar Mahomed's haste to welcome him; purpose in the compelling hand that urged him, under cover of casual talk, toward an inner room, where cushions and steaming bowls of tea were set out for two. Sight of the last went far to allay Pottinger's vexation.

"You are late, my friend," the Wazir remarked

suavely, as they sat down. "Doubtless through over-sleeping."

"No, I slept not at all," Pottinger answered, adding, without proffered excuse: "There is fresh difficulty?"

"*Inshallah!* How shall there be an end of difficulty when one partner to the bargain is a Persian? Ill hap for us that your valour, beyond praise, upon that day of slaughter hath aroused anger unappeasable in the mind of Mahomed Shah. And to-day come letters from the Hāji, also from my brother, rebuking me for base desertion of Islam in favour of infidels, who, through flattery and payment of money, would gain the whole country for themselves. Shere Mahomed writes also that until the envoy of the blasphemers—your honourable self!—hath been dismissed from the city, neither their Moojtehid nor the agent of Russia will come hither, to treat for terms of peace. Nay, more—the Most Mighty hath sent word that Herāt shall be my portion if I will send Kamrān and yourself as prisoners to the Persian camp."

The man's air of distressful compulsion was inimitable of its kind, and waked a gleam of amusement in Pottinger's eyes.

"An easy road to wealth and power," said he quietly. "I cannot answer for the king. But for myself—there is no need of *sending*. Tell me your decision, and I go at once to the camp of my own accord."

Yar Mahomed lifted hands and brows in amazement that may well have been genuine. "Great beyond thought is the nobility of the Sahib. But how should I, who am Afghan, so disregard the claims of salt and of kingship? Moreover"—here came the true reason—"the promise is doubtless empty, as all promises of Irān. Even could Mahomed Shah prevail upon me so to dishonour my country, small talk would there be of gifts:

but of greater demands, rather, by reason of advantage gained. True talk, my friend?"

"True enough. But in that case what answer shall you send?"

"It was my thought to call a consultation of chiefs to-morrow and write according to their agreement——"

At this point came interruption in form of Yar Mahomed's closest allies, the Topshi-Bāshi and Hāji Ferōz, Chief of the Eunuchs, eager for news; and Pottinger made good his chance of escape. He spent the rest of the evening in talk with his friend Deen Mahomed, who swore roundly that the chiefs would oppose, to a man, the disgraceful demand of the Shah-in-Shah.

And it was so. The consultation resulted in a straightforward letter from the Wazir to the effect that "the Englishman is a stranger and a guest; and in the present state of affairs the Afghans could not think of turning him out of the city; for if anything should happen to him it would be a lasting disgrace to the Afghan name." In conclusion Yar Mahomed assured the Asylum of the Universe that he had no mind to join with England against Irān. But, driven to choose between fighting or surrender, he chose the first, from necessity, not from any childish expectation of aid from London!

Two days later Pottinger was bidden to the Wazir's quarters that he might hear the result. Yar Mahomed was not alone. The Topshi-Bāshi, Hāji, Ferōz and other heads of departments were gathered round him in anxious conference, and it needed but the touch of awkwardness in their greeting to assure Pottinger that the stone of stumbling had not been removed.

"Well, Wazir Sahib," said he, without sign of perturbation, "I am to go, then, after all?"

"My friend, my friend! Do you account me a man

altogether without heart?" Yar Mahomed protested, italicizing the protest by the warmth of his embrace. "Have not your exertions on our behalf put the Afghans themselves to shame? And now, behold, your reputation as warrior proven afresh by the importunity of Mahomed Shah in respect of your dismissal; he being willing to conduct you, in safety, whithersoever you may choose to go. These our envoys, astonished beyond measure, have returned saying they had believed Pottinger Sahib to be one man—though dowered with the heart of a lion: but this urgency of Irān for his departure proveth him equal to an army!"

A murmur of approval from the chiefs confirmed the extravagant compliment, which Eldred Pottinger acknowledged with a simple inclination of the head.

"For the sake of Herāt," said he, "I would I were in truth equal to an army. As it is, I see myself but a stumbling-block in the way of peaceful settlement; and I would have you clearly understand that my personal safety or convenience must not be considered beside the welfare of this city, or the interests of my own country. If either of these can be better served by my departure —speak openly: and I will make haste to be gone."

But there be limits even to Afghan ingratitude: and although Yar Mahomed would fain have dispensed with one whose presence put some slight check upon his own ways and wiles, he feared that the dismissal of the man who was known to have saved the city might leave a lasting stain upon his public character. Moreover, Persia could not be trusted, and Herāt could not risk offending the British Government. Once more, therefore, diplomatic excuses were returned on the plea that Pottinger was a guest: and there an end of negotiation—for the moment.

But by now it had become dismally clear that surrender was simply a matter of time. None the less was Pottinger's unchanging word of counsel: "A little longer—a little longer still," while yet his heart contracted at thought of all that such counsel implied. Not so Yar Mahomed. In the man's whole anatomy there seemed no nerve sensitive enough for shrinking; though doubtless had any compelled him to endure the brutalities he meted out to others, the missing organ might have come to light. As it was, he heartily approved Pottinger's plan of temporizing on the chance that the Book of Fate might yet contain a word or two in their favour. Rumours of a relieving force from Turkestan inclined him the more toward a waiting game: while Pottinger—however loth to encourage expectations that might prove false—still hoped, with dogged persistence, for some promise of help from Lord Auckland that should put fresh heart into the besieged.

Meantime their broken remnant of an army, whether active or idle, must be paid; their citizens fed: and Yar Mahomed, almost at his wits' end, called a fresh assembly of chiefs to consider the desperate question of ways and means.

It was believed that the Shah had a secret store of money, to which he would not confess; while many, not without reason, suspected the Wazir of appropriating more than half the treasure he wrung from his victims. But neither conviction could be turned to practical account; and after voluminous discussion the Topshi-Bāshi advanced a proposal very much to the point. Said he: "Since the Shah will not give that which he hath, and none may force him, let me have leave to seize the person and property of whomsoever I will—without intervention from any other chief in favour of his own; and

I agree to provide all army expenses for two months without fail."

A unanimous shout greeted the drastic proposal. There and then the chiefs drew up a formal agreement, wherein they pledged themselves to non-interference on behalf of their own people. None, save the Englishman —whose name was not upon the bond—considered for a moment the renewal of brutalities involved. But since he had no counter-scheme in mind, it were futile to raise objections that would affect nothing save his own popularity—a practical asset not lightly to be flung away. And the variable mercury of Afghan favour stood high at the moment; as is shown by his comment under the same date: "They were, or appeared to be, well satisfied with me; and the Wazir quoted my anxiety and efforts, as an example to those who had their women and children to defend."

Nor had it proved altogether fruitless, that same example of unfailing energy and courage; not preached, but lived simply and unobtrusively, month after month before their eyes. Pottinger himself noted with surprise and delight the determined bearing of the chiefs at this fresh crisis, and their unanimous readiness to prolong the defence. In his own words: "With open breaches, trembling soldiery and a disaffected populace they determined to stand to the last. How I wished to have the power of producing the money!"

Throughout the next two weeks that wish became the most insistent cry of his heart. For the fiendishly simple programme of the Topshi-Bāshi—carried out with unrelenting zeal—proved an infallible recipe for pandemonium. Even the invertebrate Herāti rose up and clamoured for redress. An alarming increase of deaths

from torture wrought incessant appeals to an assembly paralyzed by that written pledge not to interfere: till Pottinger, sick to the soul of horrors that money could check, resolved on an expedient bold as it was humane. He called upon all who possessed money or treasure to contribute what they could for the defence of their city, on the strength of his bare promise that those who so came forward should be repaid, at his recommendation, by the Government of India.

The boldness and humanity of this step were alike characteristic of the man. Whether indeed a seemingly indifferent Government would repudiate or endorse it he could by no means tell. But at worst he had some small store of capital in Ireland and could rely on his great-hearted uncle for help in the fulfilment of a promise so given. The fact that this mere assurance sufficed for men born and nurtured in deceit, would seem to justify the Wazir's flattering assertion that the word of a British officer was as the word of God. Certain it is that Eldred Pottinger, on the strength of it, had the satisfaction of checking cruelty past the show of speech—were it only for a time.

But money came in slowly, and of troops from Turkestan or India the passing days brought no sign: only, at last, came the long-delayed letter from Lord Auckland that should crown their refusal to surrender with promise of speedy relief. Judge, then, the effect of its sugared emptiness upon men who had waited five months to know the result of their appeal. It was dated May 1st, and addressed to Shah Kamrān of Herāt.

"After Compliments,

"The confidence which your majesty has evinced towards me . . . has at once gratified and affected me," wrote his Lordship's secretary, surely not without a covert

smile. "May God grant that, by this time, the cloud of trouble be lifted from upon you. But the very difficulties of time and distance deprive me of the power of doing more than assuring you of the sincere sympathy which I feel for you, and of the happiness it would afford me to hear of your being in undisturbed enjoyment of your sovereignty. . . . The arrangement of affairs in this quarter has been confided by H.M. the Queen to Sir John McNeill, now on his way from Tehrān. In him I have implicit confidence . . . and in conclusion I can only say that nothing would give me greater happiness, if opportunity should serve, than to afford you substantial proof of the great value I set upon your friendship and of my desire to render you essential service."

Unsatisfying diet this for men at grips with bare actuality. Even had the letter arrived in early June, the allusion to an Ambassador already discomfited would have savoured of polite satire. Now, in mid August, with a bested McNeill on his way back to Tehrān, it came nearer to broad farce, had those who read been in the mood for enjoyment.

At the moment, it seemed to Pottinger, that they accepted manfully, and without rancour, the complete collapse of their hopes. But next morning came a note bidding him to the Wazir's house: and, on arrival, he discovered a *levée* of chiefs in full progress. He was received with a coldness amounting to discourtesy: nor was any word addressed to him while the meeting lasted. Silent and impassive, for all the rising storm of anger within, Pottinger sat on, till the signal was given for leave to depart. Then, while hand-kissings and compliments were in progress he rose and came forward, the unmistakable spark of temper in his eyes.

"Wazir Sahib," said he, "having come hither at your

express request I have a right to know why my presence was required, since you have nothing to communicate—nothing to ask?"

Yar Mahomed, perceiving he had gone too far, smiled his most disarming smile. "It is not yet certain that I have no communication for you, my friend. Only—at present—there be difficulties——"

He would have edged past but for the swift detaining grasp upon his arm. "If there be difficulties the sooner we speak of them the better. Let these depart at once, that I may have speech of you in private. Only thus can we come at a clear understanding."

Tone and bearing showed plainly that Pottinger was in no mood to be trifled with: nor was Yar Mahomed, despite his disappointment, in the mood for an open breach with Great Britain.

A suave gesture signified acquiescence. The room was cleared; and the two became speedily engrossed in the one topic they could approach with anything like community of interest. Pottinger's temper, hot though it was, could rarely hold its own against the Asiatic's insinuating plausibility, as he himself confessed in recording the interview.

"Yar Mahomed," he wrote, "is one of the most persuasive talkers I have met. It is scarcely possible to talk with him and retain anger. He is ready in a surprising degree . . . and a person who thinks nothing of denying what he has asserted a few minutes before is a most puzzling person to argue with. Until you have thought over what has been said, you cannot understand the changeable colours that have passed before you." And no doubt Yar Mahomed, on his side, found equally puzzling the Christian's clumsy inability to colour or manipulate facts in response to the call of the moment.

To-day he had need of all his plausibility in justifying a return to the drastic methods his ally had so persistently denounced.

"My friend, you must believe I regret, even as you do, the need for measures more compelling than promise of repayment," he urged with a fine show of reluctance. "Men will less readily trust that promise since the coming of your *Burra Lāt's* letter: and money is life. I am, therefore, left without choice."

"Wait, yet a little. That at least is possible," pleaded the more humane Englishman. "Help from Turkestan may be nearer than we know. Came there not word yesterday of a force near Toorbut?"

"Ay, and the day before that of a British army having captured Shiraz. And three days before that of the Shah-in-Shah's preparation for fresh assault more skilfully devised than that of June. Empty tales all—empty as mine own coffers: and men need food more stomach-filling than the breath of lying newsmongers. Have we not already waited these three weeks? And hath there come to our ears any word savouring of truth? Have we certain knowledge even of happenings in the camp itself?"

And Pottinger, ruefully aware of the way wherein he was being led, could not choose but answer: "No." So complete was now their isolation from the world without: so poignant the ache of desolation in his own heart.

"What, then, is left for us," persisted the plausible voice at his ear, "save surrender—which Allah forbid!—or money more plentiful than your generous promise can draw from a parcel of ungenerous chiefs? I tell you, Pottinger Sahib, *all* have money—all! Yet will they not even advance it—much less give. Hāji Ferōz, arch-miser, could advance two lakhs without knowledge of

loss, and Kamrān himself could supply ten. Yet have neither contributed one broken cowrie! And the rest are like unto them: thieves, misers all. When they behold their wives and daughters ravished by the Persians, then, maybe, they will repent. But now it is as if one shouted into a well. Can you wonder, my friend, if I put pressure on the people, since that alone brings result?"

For a moment Pottinger sat silent, repelled alike by the man's tale and by the underlying implication of his own unlikeness to the rest. Then he asked quietly: "Is it by no means possible to put pressure on Shah Kamrān?"

"By one means only, Sahib. Though I, who know him, know also how much it would avail. This, however, we have resolved, since the coming of the *Burra Lāt's* letter blighted all hope. We shall appoint a committee of finance, which shall make all things clear to Kamrān, adding that either must he supply money for payment of the army, or give leave that the committee shall search for it and seize it after their own fashion. Can you doubt his answer? The miser will sacrifice his people. It shall be seen."

It was seen. Without shadow of hesitation the miser sacrificed his people; and the wail of the tortured broke, yet again, upon unheeding ears. God, it seemed, had forgotten them; and worse than vain was the help of man. As for Pottinger, that passing triumph in June shrank to a mere nothing in the face of his failure to stem the tide of lawless evil within the walls.

Yet, in that darkest hour, dawn was already at hand.

Not many days after Kamrān's despicable decision came news, at last, that bore some semblance of fact. The bearer, lately arrived from the camp, asserted, on oath, that Colonel Stoddart Sahib had returned there two

weeks ago; that a British navy had anchored in the Persian Gulf, taken several ports, and had landed at Bushire "a mighty army," now advancing on Shiraz. "For this reason came Colonel Stoddart Sahib, bringing word that his country intended war, unless the Most Illustrious departed without delay."

That the Most Illustrious had succumbed to argument so forcible was proven by the packing of cannon and mortars, as for a march; the assembling of carriage-cattle and destruction of the greater guns. Obvious exaggerations apart, these things might very well be. Herāt's resolute refusal to surrender had allowed more than enough time for the awakening of Government. But suspense and all other miseries, over-long endured, robbed the news of that which it might have effected months ago.

The chiefs were still incredulous: the people stunned almost to indifference: and Eldred Pottinger, dizzy with lack of food and sharp revulsion of feeling, sat alone in his quarters, asking himself mechanically, over and over: "Can it be true—at last? Can it be even partially true?"

X

Before many days were out Herāt had proof that for once the voice of Rumour had spoken approximate truth: approximate, because the Persian Gulf demonstration was an insignificant affair that had swelled in transit, like a snowball, till it grew into a victorious armament marching upon the camp of Mahomed Shah.

As a matter of fact, two steamers and a few vessels of war had landed Bombay detachments and a marine battalion on the island of Karrak on the 19th of June. There had been no fighting. The little force was merely to hold itself in readiness for any service which Sir John McNeill might think necessary for "the maintenance of our interests in Persia." By the time the inflated reports of this unlooked-for move overtook Sir John he was well on his way back to Tehrān; and the news would have availed him little had it nŏt coincided with the advent of instructions from the Foreign Office, empowering him to threaten immediate hostilities unless Persia withdrew from Afghanistan. For him nothing could have been more opportune; and, true to his political conviction—mistaken or no—he determined on one more effort to relieve Herāt from the miseries of investment.

Hence the reappearance in camp of Colonel Stoddart, charged with a message of no uncertain tenor. The Shah, disheartened by months of failure, and startled by the report of advancing armaments, was ready enough by now to catch at any honourable pretext for retreat. Wherefore the British representative, formerly slighted,

was received with all honour and accorded an immediate hearing. On the whole nothing could have better suited Mahomed Shah than the ultimatum of Sir John McNeill; and after certain formal preliminaries—designed to save the royal face—his Mightiness declared himself willing to grant all demands sooner than forfeit the friendship of Great Britain.

"But for that," the baffled monarch added, with impressive conviction, "we would *not* return from before Herāt; and had we known our coming would endanger such a friendship it is certain we should never have left Tehrān."

Thereafter, retreat having been deftly covered, Mahomed Shah addressed himself, with leisurely dignity, to the uncongenial task of "climbing down."

Throughout the early days of September the stir in the camp was continuous; nor could the densest doubt its meaning. Danger from that quarter was over. The Herāt siege—one of the most memorable in Eastern history—was at an end.

Men in the street repeated the fact to one another merely as a fact, without surprise, without enthusiasm. In their hearts they knew too well that they had but escaped the Scylla of Persian rapine to fall into the Charybdis of a paternal Afghan government. "All I wonder," wrote Pottinger when recording the fact in his journal, "is that not a man can be found among them bold enough to terminate their miseries by the death of their oppressors." In the meantime all prisoners were returned to the Persian camp; guns were limbered up, tents struck; and on the night of September the 9th the Most Mighty himself, with the last detachment of his formidable army, rode forth into the landscape, baffled, but by no means without hope of return.

Whether or no he recognized that failure was due as much to jealousy and lack of concert among his chiefs as to Herāt's stubborn resistance, does not appear; for the simple reason that no shadow of that distressful word was permitted to blur the magniloquence of the royal firman "setting forth all the great results of his expedition eastward."

The Herāt episode—pruned of superfluous verbosity—was thus inimitably rounded off: "At last, when the city existed but in name . . . the noble ambassadors of the illustrious British Government—notwithstanding three separate treaties of peace between the Governments of England and Persia—despatched a naval armament, with troops and forces, to the Gulf of Persia. The winter season was now approaching, and . . . there appeared a possibility that our victorious army might suffer from a scarcity of provisions; the tranquillity of our provinces was also a matter of serious attention to our benevolent thoughts: and thus, in sole consideration of the interests of our faith and country, and from a due regard to the welfare of our subjects, we set in motion our world-subduing army, and prepared to return to our capital. . . . During the protracted siege of Herāt a vast number of the troops and inhabitants had perished . . . the remainder of the people . . . who had been treated with the most liberal kindness by the officers of our Government . . . marched away with us, with zealous eagerness, and there was no vestige of an inhabited spot left around Herāt."

This last came nearer to the truth than the main part of Mahomed Shah's proclamation. In ten months a population of some sixty thousand had been reduced to one-tenth; and the support of even that insignificant remainder was beyond the resources of a province for

the moment utterly destroyed. It is recorded by an eye-witness that, in those ten months, the Persians had wrought such havoc and devastation as would scarce have resulted from fifty years of civil war. The beauty of that most fertile valley was clean gone, as though it had never been. Not fields and orchards merely, but scores of picturesque villages, gardens and tree-bordered esplanades had been wantonly destroyed; while within the battered walls, ruin and desolation showed the more hideously that they were crowded into a narrower space. Bazaars, *seráis*, public baths and private dwellings—few had escaped mutilation; and many of those nearest the walls had been pulled down to repair breaches made by the enemies' guns.

Well for Herāt and for Eldred Pottinger had that been all. But this hapless city, satiate with the horrors of war, must now gird itself to endure the horrors of peace, whereof we are apt to hear far less; though it is by no means certain that they are not the more degrading, the more deeply corrosive to human life and character. It was against these that Pottinger straightway set himself to contend with a spirit and vigour seemingly unimpaired by hardships already undergone. But the mass of labour thus thrown upon his shoulders was more than a second Hercules could have achieved unaided; and, at Pottinger's own request, Colonel Stoddart consented to join him on the departure of the Persian troops. He was under orders at the time to proceed upon a mission to Bokhara, with the double object of negotiating for the release of certain Russian captives and concluding a friendly treaty with the Amir. But, in the circumstances, he agreed to stay on until some measure of law and order should be restored.

So these two solitary Englishmen settled down serenely

enough in the midst of pestilence, tyranny and famine, undaunted by the hopeless nature of their new task; while Persia's all-conquering army melted into the horizon, and the siege of Herāt was no longer a painful exigency, but an item of Asiatic history, significant or insignificant, according to the historian's political profession of faith.

Needless to review in detail the conflicting statements of these last in regard to Russia's underlying motive, or the vexed question whether the fall of Herāt would or would not have endangered the safety of India to the extent feared by men of proven ability, both in England and the East.

Perhaps, among them all, there are few opinions better worth considering than that of Sir Henry Rawlinson—himself an ex-Afghan political of sound judgment, insight and first-hand knowledge. In his view Russia's desire was less toward invasion than toward the estrangement of England and Persia, whereby she hoped to strengthen her moral influence in the East, while keeping India constantly anxious, constantly prepared for that which might never come to pass. On the showing of her own statesmen her Herāt policy was of the order of Yar Mahomed: Heads I win; tails you lose. If Herāt had fallen, as was expected, Kabul and Kandahar would certainly have followed suit. Russo-Persian influence—pushed, thus, to the threshold of India—implied at best much internal agitation among native provinces and states; at worst "a difficult and expensive war to avert more serious dangers." If, on the other hand, England interfered to save Herāt, she was compromised, not merely with the court of Mahomed Shah, but with Persia as a nation. For "Russia had contrived to identify all Persia with the success or failure of the campaign."

The question of England's very doubtful right to interfere at all has been amply discussed by authorities political and historical. Right or no right, the present record is mainly concerned with the fact that an unforeseen tangle of events conspired to keep Pottinger at Herāt in the hour of her danger; and but for his presence the Afghan heroes would undoubtedly have succumbed, or betrayed her to Persia, before three months were out. It is Sir Henry's belief that the ultimate fate of the city was decided not by the insignificant demonstration at Karrak, but by the gallantry of Eldred Pottinger on the 24th of June; that, in effect, she owed her independence to an adventurous, high-hearted subaltern, backed by the exertions of Sir John McNeill.

Now that the events of those stormy years are seen in clearer proportion than nearness permits, it is difficult to realize the effect produced all through India by the news that a subaltern of artillery in Herāt had overset all Mahomed Shah's calculations, broken up the ground under Dōst Mahomed's feet, and "made the political situation in western Asia better for England than it had been at the time of Burnes' mission."

By October it had reached Simla—too late, unhappily, to do more than modify the warlike preparations already on foot. By November Lord Auckland was writing privately to Sir John Hobhouse: "I have appointed Lieut. Pottinger to be political agent at Herāt, and have given him praise in the *Gazette* and a salary of 1000 Rs. a month, with a recommendation to the Court that it date from the commencement of the siege. I hope this will not be thought extravagant. His chivalrous adventure, his admirable conduct and their extraordinary results ought to be on record and upheld."

That *Gazette* was read with a glow of pride by Colonel

Henry Pottinger, Captain Ward (Eldred's former commandant) and three brothers stationed in different parts of the country. Not a whit less gratifying than the appointment itself was the tribute of praise that followed; and Lord Auckland's "marked satisfaction in bestowing the high applause due to the signal merits of Lieutenant Pottinger, who . . . under circumstances of peculiar danger and difficulty, has, by his fortitude, ability and judgment, honourably sustained the reputation and interests of his country."

From all sides congratulations flowed in, by letter and by word of mouth. But not until many weeks after the New Year had dawned did Eldred Pottinger himself awake to the knowledge that, in climbing the steeps of duty, with never a step of the road visible ahead, he had stumbled unwittingly upon the summit of fame and become the hero of the hour.

BOOK III

SOLDIER-POLITICAL

I dreamed I was an husbandman, whom God sent into a dreary world. I toiled, breaking up the hard earth; but the more I worked the tougher looked my plot. I was tired; and when I saw that God watched me as I worked I said: "The toil is hard, but I shall see the fruit." God turned away, saying: "You shall not see the fruit." I cried aloud: "But there will be fruit, O Lord?" And God said: "For all your labour you get strength, not fruit." And I, complaining: "Lord, it were so much better to find wild flowers that might be trained to be more beautiful. But here are always thorns for me to eat." And God said: "If there were not thorns, I had here no need of such an husbandman as you."

So, from the sally, each obeys
The unseen, almighty nod;
So, till the ending, all their ways
Blind-folded, loth, have trod:
Nor knew their work at all, but were
The tools of God.

R. L. S.

I

But the sustaining knowledge of appreciation and reward was still afar off: and throughout the intervening months many things were fated to be done and endured, not only by the two Englishmen and their famine-stricken remnant, but also by the newly-formed army of the Indus: one of the most long-suffering scapegoats of folly and iniquity, in high places, to be found in the annals of all time.

The events which culminated in Lord Auckland's notorious Simla manifesto had been long a-brewing. As early as May the arrival of Simonich at Herāt, of Vickovitch at Kabul and the failure of Burnes' mission had brought visions of war to the peace-loving Viceroy, and sowed in the fertile brains of his secretaries the seeds of their Great Design.

Indiscreet and lacking in dignity as Burnes unquestionably was, yet—in this case—if left unhampered he would no doubt have secured the friendly allegiance of both Kabul and Kandahar. But unhappily, as has been seen, his opinions were constantly neutralized by Wade's plausible arguments or bold contradictions, with the result that Dōst Mahomed was finally decreed to be a hostile chief; "and," adds Kaye, "the policy of the Government soon made him one."

As for Burnes, on reaching Simla in July he is said to have been greeted by Macnaghten's fellow-secretaries, Colvin and Torrens, with an eager request that he would "say nothing to unsettle his lordship; that they had had

all the trouble in the world to get him into the business, and even now he would be glad of any pretext to retire." But the baffled champion of Barakzai supremacy had already despatched his final protest in the shape of a long letter to Macnaghten propounding the best line of policy "under the circumstances, which a series of blunders have produced," and concluding with a paragraph very much to his credit: "It still remains to be reconsidered *why* we cannot act with Dōst Mahomed Khan. He is a man of undoubted ability, and has, at heart, a high opinion of the British nation: and if half you must do for others were done for him he would abandon Persia and Russia to-morrow. It may be said that opportunity has been given him; but . . . at best he had a choice of difficulties, and it should not be forgotten that *we* promised nothing, while Russia and Persia offered a good deal."

It was not forgotten. It was suppressed.

In the meantime, a few days in Simla sufficed to convince Burnes that crude theories and inflated ambition were destined to override all obstacles, not excluding the dictates of justice and national honour. He was quick, also, to perceive that the golden key to promotion and preferment was enthusiasm for the royal exile: and, being no Quixote but a mere man, eager above all things for place and power, he turned his back thenceforward on the lost cause of Dōst Mahomed Khan.

Having been duly warned not to unsettle his lordship, he was requested to state his views on the supreme topic of the hour: the which he did with a touch of his incurable exaggeration.

"Self defence," said he, "is the first law of nature. If you cannot bring round Dōst Mahomed, whom you have used infamously, you must set up Shah Shujah as

a puppet, and establish your supremacy in Afghanistan—or you will *lose India!* "

The same trick of sacrificing accuracy to an effective air of omniscience, prompted the further assertion that the British Government need only send Shah Shujah to Peshawar, "with an agent and two of its own regiments as honorary escort, and an avowal to the Afghans that we have taken up his cause, to ensure his being fixed *for ever* on the throne."

Before two years were out the fallacy of this daring overstatement had been proved up to the hilt. But, throughout that eventful summer, no prevision of tragic issues clouded the sanguine temper of Alexander Burnes or the airy visions of William Macnaghten; though both men were enthusiastically occupied in digging their own graves.

When Burnes reached Simla, Macnaghten was still at the court of Ranjit Singh remodelling a former treaty, whereby it was now agreed that the Maharajah and the British Government should heartily co-operate in the thankless task of restoring Shah Shujah, the Undesired, to the throne of his very few ancestors. British co-operation was to take the form of providing officers for troops levied by the Shah, and, incidentally, of establishing an agent at Kabul. British bayonets were not to figure in the final tableau. On this point the Shah laid explicit emphasis, and all was amicably arranged. But Macnaghten had yet to reckon with "Bokhara Burnes," who dismissed the concession to Afghan vanity with high-handed assurance. "We *must* appear directly," was his dictum. "The Afghans are a superstitious people and believe Shah Shujah to have no fortune. But our name will invest him with it," a not-unwarrantable supposition, though events failed to bear it out.

In justice to Captain Wade—whose letters were garbled almost as shamelessly as those of Burnes—it should be recorded that his vote in favour of Shah Shujah was qualified by one notable proviso: that the Shah's "recognition could only be justified or demanded of us" *if* Herāt should fall into the hands of Persia. Had that reasonable "if" been regarded the result of Eldred Pottinger's chivalrous adventure would have been memorable indeed! But qualifications, however reasonable, did not find favour with the Simla Cabinet of 1838. In their eyes the Great Design was its own justification; and although the relief of Herāt was put forward as its ostensible aim, their ultimate actions gave the lie to their words.

In regard to the vexed question of responsibility the earliest despatches of the period almost suggest a "competition between London and Simla for the discredit of initiating the ill-starred project": and as for the crop of complications that ensued, the most omniscient could scarcely venture a definite indictment; so complex were the influences, motives and prejudices involved; so strangely malign were the ironies of circumstance. Wherever the wrong choice or the wrong decision could be made, so surely it was made, with dismal iteration. Wherever the situation demanded cool judgment or delay, there did hot-headed impulse rush blindly in. Wherever the need of the hour was for prompt and vigorous action, so surely was it paralyzed by discussion and delay. Some half-a-dozen names at least stand out with unenviable distinctness, and perhaps among them all was none more eager, more blindly optimistic than William Macnaghten, brave gentleman and brilliant scholar; but unstable of judgment, and more experienced in irresponsible office than in direct dealings with men.

But the project held out promise of distinction, and possibly of high office; and from first to last he could not, or would not, perceive that it was "a mistake in policy, and in morality—a crime."

And what of the harassed Governor-General? The man who, three years earlier, had rejoiced at the prospect of "improving the administration of justice in India," and had met Dōst Mahomed's appeal for help with the reminder that it was not the habit of his Government "to interfere with the affairs of other independent states"; the "safe man" chosen by the Whigs to oust an already-appointed nobleman of high character and approved diplomatic skill—what of him?

Even as a General is held responsible for the doings of his troops, so must Lord Auckland be held responsible for that which he permitted, whether or no he was coerced into consent. Between mutilated letters and suppressed despatches his actual share in the project will never rightly be known; but that he assumed the full responsibility his own letters to the Indian House give proof. On May the 22nd he sent home word of the failure at Kabul and the probability of war. In August followed a detailed account of his policy, capped by the amazing conclusion that "of the justice of the course about to be pursued, there cannot exist a reasonable doubt."

It has been said with truth that the only parallel to this peculiar view of justice was the attempt of Louis XIV to oust William of Orange in favour of James Stuart. Yet—such is human inconsistency—a Liberal English Cabinet warmly approved the plan.

In August, also, the troops chosen by the Commander-in-Chief were warned for service. Burnes' airy suggestion of a "regiment or two" did not commend itself to

the soldierly temper of Sir Henry Fane. He flatly disapproved of the manufactured quarrel; but, being in, he would have his country bear it that the opposer should beware of her. Half measures were not for him. Moreover, how should a couple of regiments relieve or recapture Herāt, whose fate was not yet known? An awkward question, that; for, at heart, the Man of Peace was by no means prepared for the costly hazard of a trans-Indus war. But the Commander-in-Chief was adamant; the Simla Cabinet chorussed approval, and, after several weeks of indeterminate swaying, Lord Auckland succumbed to the lot of him who hesitates.

On September the 9th Mahomed Shah had turned his back upon Herāt. On September the 13th an order was issued for the assembling of an army that numbered, eventually, twenty-five thousand men, with Sir Henry Fane in supreme command. Already, from cantonment to cantoment, a whisper of war had been carried by Rumour, the swift-footed; and now at every mess-table and race-meeting, and wherever Anglo-Indians foregathered, one topic was in the mouths of men, one unspoken fear lay chill at the hearts of women. War; service;—to the true soldier there is magic in the words; the more so when their sound goes forth after eleven years of peace. Since the storming and capture of Bhurtpore, in 1827, there had been no such stir and preparation in the land; but to the credit of the officers be it said, that, for all their thrill of action and eagerness to explore an unknown country, there was scarce one among them who did not wish he were to draw sword in more honest cause.

So much for the army. But the Great Design was, before all things, a political affair; demanding a civil agent, "to direct the mind of the Shah" and the general

outline—military operations excepted—of the great campaign.

The king's son, with a small native force and fifteen thousand Sikhs, was to march up through the Punjab *via* Peshawar. But the shrewd old Maharajah did not seem to relish the idea that his allies should march a full-fledged army through his dominions, and the larger force, escorting Shah Shujah, must needs enter Afghanistan by the Indus route *via* Quetta and Kandahar. It had been decreed that a British envoy accompany each party, and the shepherding of the Punjab force fell naturally to Captain Wade, translated into Lieut.-Colonel for the sake of prestige. The choice of an envoy, who should act as right hand to the Royal Pretender, was a matter of far greater moment.

That Burnes regarded the post as virtually his own is proved by a letter written from Simla in July: We are now planning a grand campaign. . . . What exact part *I* am to play I know not; but if . . . hourly consultation be any pledge, I am to be chief. I can tell them plainly it is *aut Cæsar, aut nullus;* and if I get not what I have a right to, you will soon see me *en route* for England." But Lord Auckland, not without cause, mistrusted the discretion of this curiously volatile Scot, and a month later, behold "Cæsar" ruefully preparing—not to leave India, but to "take a lower room."

"I believe the chief and Macnaghten will be made a commission; Wade and myself political agents under them," he wrote to a friend. "I plainly told Lord Auckland this does not please; . . . and he pledged himself to leave me independent quickly and in the highest appointment. What can I do when he tells me I am a man he cannot spare?" But his disappointment was keen and his vanity chafed under the arrangement, even

though he reflected, by way of consolation, that it were preferable Dōst Mahomed should be ousted by another hand than his own.

Macnaghten, it appears, had proposed himself, and his claim to carry out his own cherished policy can scarce be denied. None the less, to unbiassed observers it seemed certain that the Governor-General's choice would fall upon Colonel Henry Pottinger. His clear head, uncompromising character and knowledge of the country stamped him as pre-eminently the man for so high and responsible a post; nor was Lord Auckland blind to his obvious qualifications. But he had no intimate knowledge of Pottinger, and their opinions had a tendency to clash; moreover, the man who frankly sets principle before expedient very rarely basks in official favour. Macnaghten, on the other hand, was a personal friend with whom he had fully discussed his political views, and "who would not scruple to carry them out to the utmost." To what lengths a word so unlimited might be stretched neither of them could be expected to foresee. India's guardian angel was sleeping or on a journey in those days, and William Macnaghten was duly gazetted, "Envoy and Minister on the part of the Government of India at the Court of Shah Shujah-ul-Mulk," while Burnes figured in the same document as "Envoy of the Chief of Kelāt and other states"—under Macnaghten's directions; a bitter pill this last.

Impossible to avoid the thought that, had Henry Pottinger been given his due, England might have been spared that discreditable chapter of history commonly known as "the Afghanistan blunder." For William Macnaghten knew little of men, less of Asiatic intrigue, and nothing of Afghanistan or its people. Worse than all, he was a man of books—not a man of action. His

tragic failure is but one outstanding proof, among scores, that the examination paper is not the true test of fitness for Indian service; or, indeed, for any service demanding, before all things, character, sense of responsibility and capacity for action.

As early as 1879 men who knew the country and its needs noted with apprehension the advent of the "competition wallah"; fearing lest he abolish the fine old tradition of whole families devoted to her service. In that very summer of '38 India boasted four Lawrences, three Conollys, three Broadfoots and half-a-dozen Pottingers, to say nothing of other remarkable family groups, many among whom would have been ignominiously "spun" by the Civil Service Commissioners. Clive himself would, without question, have shared the same fate. Yet was he the "heaven-born General" who founded our Indian Empire; while the amiable and accomplished Macnaghten, winner of countless University prizes, went near to wrecking the Empire founded by a born leader of men.

But none had leisure to doubt the issue when every cantonment was astir with preparation for the grand military promenade at the frontier station of Ferozepore, where the new-made allies would meet, and metaphorically embrace, before launching their righteous protest against Persia's unjustifiable aggression "and the hostile policy" of a chief whom, between them, they had driven into her arms.

Remained only, to crown all, that notorious Simla manifesto, wherein, as has been truly said, "the views and conduct of Dōst Mahomed Khan were misrepresented with a hardihood which a Russian statesman might have envied," while the words "justice and necessity; the terms frontier and . . . national defence were applied in a

manner for which there is fortunately no precedent in the English language." And for the credit of the British Rāj it may be added that Lord Auckland's fashion of applying them still stands alone.

"In that remarkable document," writes Captain Trotter, "Dōst Mahomed was charged with making 'a sudden and unprovoked attack' upon our ancient ally Ranjit Singh; with 'urging the most unreasonable pretensions' to Peshawar; with forming schemes of 'aggrandizement and ambition injurious to the security and peace of the frontiers of India'—as if Peshawar were then our frontier! . . . Wherefore the Governor-General had determined to espouse the cause of Shah Shujah, whose popularity in his own country had been clearly proved, and whose power would now be supported 'against foreign interference and factious opposition by a British army.'

"The spirit of truth had little part in the framing of a document which began by stating that Lord Auckland had, 'with the concurrence of the Supreme Council,' ordered the assembling of a British force for service across the Indus. In point of fact the Supreme Council had just sent home a formal protest against a measure on which their opinion had never been recorded."

By early November all India knew that at least one object of the expedition had been attained, its one doubtful justification swept clean away. But so assiduously had the poison of prejudice and of Russophobia been instilled into Lord Auckland's mind, that he believed himself bound to persevere with an expedition unanimously denounced by India's oldest and wisest politicians: Wellesley, Metcalfe, and Mountstuart Elphinstone, not to mention the Court of Directors and the Great Duke himself.

Hard to believe that in 1837 the new Governor-General had waxed irate when Burnes suggested consolidating Afghanistan under the Dōst, and had declared that, across the Indus, Government would countenance no king. Yet behold him, a year later, deliberately preparing to fling away good money and valuable lives in the hope of establishing two—Shah Shujah and Shah Kamrān.

II

"Do you believe His Puppetship has the smallest intention of issuing that fiat against promiscuous tyranny? And if he did—do you believe our Asiatic Napoleon would obey?"

The speaker was Charles Stoddart. Restlessly pacing their mud-walled living room in Pottinger's quarters, he paused and flung the question at his companion.

Pottinger, seated at the writing-table, looked up with a rueful smile. "No," said he quietly. "I have lived more than a year in Herāt; and I believe neither."

"Then we must simply insist, and re-insist, *ad infinitum*?"

"My dear fellow—what else? Unless we steadily set our faces against tyranny, injustice and slavery, our presence here would be worse than a farce. It would be a flat denial of our faith, to say nothing of common humanity."

Stoddart acquiesced in silence. The broken lines of an irascible temper deepened between his brows.

"Damn that plausible scoundrel!" was his next contribution to the discussion. "Insisting, on principle, is all very fine. But the question remains—*can* we hope to establish any semblance of law and order in this pestilential hole, except over the corpse of our noble ally—Yar Mahomed Khan?"

Said Pottinger, with his air of unperturbed detachment: "Frankly—I think not."

"Then I wish to God I could get leave to shoot the devil out of hand!"

At that, Eldred Pottinger's rare smile flashed out. "Not you, my dear fellow. That privilege would be mine! I've been tempted to take it, leave or no leave, a score of times before now. But, after all, raging against the man is sheer waste of energy that might be more profitably employed. And, as for the outcome—these people have a good saying: 'The work is with us; the event is with Allah.' Now, if you let me be for ten minutes, I can finish this letter to Government. We are over-due at the Citadel; and I am anxious to find out how far the king *has* attempted to keep his word."

Colonel Stoddart glanced amusedly at the thin, closely-written sheet. "I don't envy you," said he, "attempting to put the tale of our doings coherently on to paper!"

And Pottinger, with grave conviction: "*I* don't envy the man who has to read the result! Coherence is beyond me; but I do my best to give them the truth, so far as I can make it out."

"That's the hardest job of all!—I won't hinder you any more. When you are ready, let me know."

Left alone, Pottinger passed a hand across his eyes; for he was weary in body and spirit. Then, with a sigh, he once more took up his pen—at all times an unready weapon to this man, whose genius was genius of character, and his sole means of self-revealing—action. But whatever Pottinger was called upon to do, he did with his might. His letters to Government during that disheartening year, are marvels of copious, if somewhat chaotic, information: and Calcutta secretaries, too ignorant of the country to read between the lines, may well be excused if his involved phrases and hazy punctuation gave them, at times, a misleading idea of the writer and of the work he was so zealously striving to do. Worse than all—action itself seemed like to be stultified at every turn, by

the one man who could—if he would—ensure the success of their attempts to renew the shattered city out of its own ashes. Yet, on this 14th morning of October, Eldred Pottinger could look back on five weeks of effort not altogether barren of result.

On the day that Colonel Stoddart joined him, they had sent criers round the city—at Kamrān's request—announcing that Herāt was now under British protection; that, for one year, the ruined citizens should be free from the burden of taxation; that seed and corn would be provided for the barren fields; while shop-keepers and cultivators would be encouraged to start afresh by grants of money repayable in three years. The loss of revenue to Kamrān was to be balanced by a loan from the British Government, also repayable in three years.

So far well enough. Yar Mahomed had no quarrel with British beneficence that put good rupees into the public coffers, and served to check the flight of despairing Herātis, many of whom had sold themselves as slaves to get quit of Afghan tyranny and provide food for their families. But when he found himself expected, in return, to refrain from extortion, slave-dealing and terrorism, he began to take counsel with his heart as to whether the benevolence of these smooth-tongued unbelievers might not cloak an influence too powerful to suit his own private schemes of self-aggrandizement. From the day when he decided that it was so, the situation resolved itself into a prolonged duel—now covert, now fiercely manifest—with Pottinger and himself for principals, and for seconds, Colonel Stoddart and Shah Kamrān.

Thus:—upon Pottinger's request that the police be re-established, a proclamation was issued with engaging promptness; and next morning a soldier of the Wazir's household was arrested for aggravated extortion and

assault. His friends—failing to recognize the link between a mere proclamation and wanton interference with a man's normal habits—set upon the hapless policeman, and, save for the intervention of two Syuds, would have doctored his superfluous zeal with correctives peculiarly their own.

Pottinger protested, on behalf of his Government, and straightway set up a primitive court of appeal at the Pae-i-Takht: literally The Foot of the Throne, actually a public place of justice—or the reverse. Here he announced, before the assembled chiefs and people, that he, as representative of the British Government, guaranteed the maintenance of justice and the abolition of slavery throughout the province of Herāt. And here he came daily, with Colonel Stoddart and a friendly Mullah, whose holiness gave greater weight to the proceedings. Even so inadequate a check on violence and crime had a moral effect; and the people who thronged in gratitude to Pottinger's house, departed thence with renewed assurance that the British Government would uphold justice in the land.

When these words reached the ears of Yar Mahomed Khan, he resolved the more firmly in his heart that a Government thus minded should never become paramount in Herāt. So long as money flowed in plenty, just so long would he suffer the intrusion of her officers. Then —*pfah!* he would spue them out of his mouth as a man spues out the stone of a peach when juice and flesh are gone.

Meanwhile he bided his next excuse for reasserting his own pre-eminence. Nor was an occasion far to seek. The licence and rapine of his own soldiery soon drove Pottinger to proclaim that the British Government—after rewarding all who had served through the siege—would

recognize no troops but those of the Shah, in whose service all volunteers could be enrolled. By arrangement, also, with his good friends the Hindu merchants, he had redeemed the Crown jewels and secured an advance of money sufficient to relieve the most distressful cases and revive, in a measure, the fallen status of the king's household.

Here were excuses enough and to spare. Ignorant of the means at Pottinger's command, the Wazir's faction argued that Sahibs who redeemed jewels, paid the king's servants and gave the children's food to the dogs, must possess treasure in plenty: and since none came their way, they determined to help themselves. Hence renewed outbursts of violence, and a public declaration by Yar Mahomed of an immediate return to his old tyrannic methods of shepherding the people of Herāt. It was this last that had impelled the two officers to draw from Shah Kamrān the promise of a counter-declaration to be issued by his Chief of Eunuchs, Hāji Ferōz Khan. But Pottinger knew enough, by now, of Afghan promises to trust nothing short of the accomplished fact.

That it was not accomplished, nor like to be, he discovered speedily enough.

Arrived at the Citadel, they were met in the bare, unimposing Hall of Audience, by those kindred spirits of evil, Hāji Ferōz and Yar Mahomed Khan, the last attended by a crowd of armed retainers, without whom he never set foot outside his own door. He greeted his allies with studied coldness. But the eunuch—preferring always the pose of peacemaker—fervently besought his friends to purge their hearts once for all of distrust and dissension, altogether unnatural between those who had worked together so hard and so long.

"The Wazir Sahib," he concluded, with an ingratiat-

ing gesture, "is of one mind with me in this matter. Is it not so, my friend?"

Thus appealed to, Yar Mahomed displayed his unsightly teeth without changing the expression of his eyes.

"The Hāji speaks truth, as always. And surely, my friend, *your* understanding heart can make allowance for my difficulties. Do I not grieve, also, at the plight of my people? Yet my troops demand payment. My retainers must be clothed and fed. Give me only a written promise from your Government to pay this State five lakhs of rupees" (£50,000) "in compensation for loss of one year's revenue, and I will abolish every tax and duty as you desire."

Pottinger suppressed a smile at the barefaced demand of one year's revenue multiplied by five. "I have said already that my Government is willing to make good your loss," he answered, with quiet emphasis on the last words, "provided you forgo all taxes and publicly annul your declaration that tyranny should be your weapon, to be wielded as you chose."

"So be it. That is a fair bargain, as between friends. To-day I will command the officers of justice that they make an end of extorting taxes by violence. So long as I can get money elsewhere—so long the people shall rest in peace."

Upon that assurance Pottinger took his leave; marvelling inwardly how long this surprising access of virtue would endure.

He was not left many hours in doubt.

No orders were given to the officers of justice. The paper drawn up by him and sent to Hāji Ferōz was not returned with the Minister's signature. Instead came the significant news that taxes were being levied by Shere Mahomed, armed with the King's *firman*, and that the

Wazir had suddenly withdrawn his own contribution to the city police, thereby reducing a force, already insignificant, to the paltry number of twenty-five men. Pottinger, sick to the soul of vain remonstrance, looked for some sort of explanation. None was forthcoming: and anxious always to avoid needless friction, he said no word.

Two days later a provision *Khafila*—reassured by his promises of good treatment—ventured into Herāt, and was so flagrantly mulcted at the city gate, that its owners thronged to the British agent's quarters overwhelming him with remonstrance and reproach.

"A fine lot of use tweaking the devil's tail, when we are powerless to cut his claws!" cried Stoddart the irascible. "Better send for him and confront him with these fellows——"

A familiar voice sounded without.

"Talk of the devil!" said Pottinger, with a wry smile; and Yar Mahomed entered on the words.

"This is shameful conduct, Wazir Sahib," the Englishman greeted him sternly: and he, with fluent readiness—

"Shameful, indeed, my friend, that such things be done without authority, blackening my good name after promises given."

At that, Pottinger pensively caressed his beard, and Stoddart, muttering inarticulate curses, swung out of the room.

Yar Mahomed glanced after him, the glint of steel in his eyes. But although the arrogant temper of the Englishman waked his worst passions and galled him at every turn, he knew the value of biding his time, the better to strike home when the acceptable moment arrived. Without a word of comment he issued peremptory orders that men be sent to recover all imposts levied on the *Khafila*, and restore all promises to pay.

That done he confronted Pottinger with a fine assumption of magnanimity. "Have I satisfied you *now*, my friend?"

Pottinger regarded him with disconcerting directness. "For the present—yes," said he. "For the future it might be well to keep a stricter check upon your followers, remembering that my guarantees of justice and good faith were given at the Shah's express desire. There was also a certain paper sent by me to Hāji Ferōz——"

"A paper? *Wah-illah!* I must rebuke the Hāji for negligence of duty. To-morrow that matter shall be settled between us; and upon his Majesty's consenting, the paper shall be signed without delay. At ten o'clock I will meet you and Colonel Stoddart Sahib at the Citadel. It is agreed?"

"It is agreed," answered Pottinger. "On the stroke of the hour we will be there."

True to promise, at ten next morning the two British officers entered the Hall of Audience.

It was empty.

"I'll lay you long odds he won't turn up," said Stoddart.

"He will," said Pottinger; and they sat them down, Afghan-fashion, on a couple of mats to wait upon the good pleasure of Yar Mahomed Khan.

The minutes slipped on to half-an-hour; to an hour; to an hour and three quarters. Still no sign of the Wazir; and Stoddart—long since bankrupt of patience—sprang to his feet.

"Damn the fellow's impertinence! Why should *we* stay kicking our heels here any longer?"

Pottinger thrust out his lower lip; a trick that empha-

sized his resolute aspect. "I have said I will meet him here. I shall stay till he comes. There is only one rule in dealing with that sort of scoundrel. Give him no handle against you—and keep a straight path."

"Quite so. But is any good ever coming out of it all? It's an impossible game you're playing——"

Pottinger sighed. "I begin to be afraid it is. But until his lordship and Mr. Macnaghten are convinced of that fact, I can only play it to the best of my power. Ah—the Wazir——"

Both men rose to their feet as Yar Mahomed swaggered into the hall at the head of a retinue more imposing by far than that of the King.

"Aha, Pottinger Sahib!" he cried, and waved his hand with a jaunty air of *bonhommie* more exasperating than open antagonism. Then, without apology or excuse, he plunged into a lively account of a street disturbance that had entertained them by the way.

Pottinger listened patiently for five minutes; then: "We have not waited here two hours, Wazir Sahib, in order to talk street gossip," he remarked, with incisive quietness. "You may remember we came on business at your request; and if you have the leisure——"

Yar Mahomed scowled. "Leisure! Oh yes. Very well, let us go on. That paper you spoke of—I have considered it. In my opinion there is only one answer to be given. *First*, I demand from your Government promise of a year's revenue, *then* I give you mine in exchange. Believe me, Pottinger Sahib, there is no other way but this to give my people relief. Pay me, or promise me in writing, five lakhs of rupees, and you will hear no more of tyranny and extortion."

Pottinger shook his head. "Trees are wont to bud before they bear fruit," said he; "and, since the siege

ended, I have looked in vain for buds. In any case I would refuse to dishonour my Government by bargaining with tyranny, and thus admitting its equal rights. I tell you plainly, Wazir Sahib, that your conduct, in this matter, leaves me no choice but to demand a *firman* from the King forbidding extortion against his orders; and to warn you that my Government will hold you responsible for robbing and torturing those whom it is your duty to help."

At that, with a cryptic grunt, the Wazir swung round upon his heel, and was confronted by a message summoning them to the Royal presence.

"Aha! *Now* it shall be seen which of us two his Majesty will uphold," cried he, and swaggered off without waiting, as usual, for Pottinger to precede him.

Stoddart turned to his friend. "Stand up to them, man. It looks like breakers ahead. But the affair's no business of mine, and I am better out of the way."

Pottinger nodded and passed on, his jaw set, his blood tingling at the studied insult. It was the prelude merely, as Stoddart had foreseen.

When Pottinger presented himself, the Wazir was already in possession of the field. Kamrān acknowledged the British agent's salute; no more: and for a full half-hour Pottinger quietly stood his ground while the two Afghans carried on their talk as though none other were present. But that one of the two was King, and the interests of his own Government were at stake, he would have left them without a word. As it was, he took advantage of a pause to draw nearer and salute again.

"May it please your Majesty, I am here by appointment with Yar Mahomed Khan to settle an affair of some importance."

Kamrān regarded him a moment with indolent surprise; then turned again to the Wazir.

"What is this affair of which he speaks, my friend?"

Yar Mahomed shrugged his shoulders, and spread out his hands. "Merely some fresh disturbance he is making, because he would have me sign a paper promising to make an end of taxes, and I have refused to do this without the King's order."

Kamrān Shah drew himself up with an abortive attempt at dignity. "You did well. And what is this talk of a paper, Pottinger Sahib? Have not I myself said that unjust extortions shall cease?"

"From your Majesty I ask no more. But if Yar Mahomed Khan would save his own face and retain British friendship, he *must* retract in writing his public declaration to tyrannize, even in defiance of your Majesty's order——"

"*Bismillah!*" Yar Mahomed swung round with the snarl of a trapped wolf. "Hear how this fellow maligns me out of his own evil heart——"

But Pottinger—perceiving the man's design to goad him into anger—quietly continued his statement to the King; patiently reiterating the willingness of his Government to advance a year's revenue on condition that taxes be not impressed nor the sum advanced be spent without regard for Lord Auckland's advice.

"Wah—wah! Fine conditions!" sneered Yar Mahomed, casting up his eyes. "These be lords of creation indeed! Professing to win a country by friendship, while putting the King himself in leading-strings!"

"*Will* your Highness be pleased to grant me a fair hearing—or no?" Pottinger demanded, smothered impatience in his tone.

But the Wazir's well-aimed shaft had pricked the one sensitive spot in Kamrān's anatomy.

"Why *should* I give hearing when I am ill and you

speak words without sense? The Wazir knows my heart, and his wishes are mine. As for your talk of money and conditions—there has been no time yet for instructions to arrive. You are speaking mere inventions without authority of your Government."

But Pottinger had endured enough. "If your Highness really believes *that*," he broke in hotly, "you have but to repeat it, and I leave the citadel at once; nor will I ever return to trouble you again."

The man would have been as good as his word; and Shah Kamrān knew it. Fearful as he was of Yar Mahomed, he held in greater awe that colossal abstraction the British Government, whose good rupees alone could restore his shattered city. Awkwardly, and still irritably, he blurted out an attempt at apology; muttered of eternal gratitude to the saviour of Herāt, and finally reverted, as always, to the paramount subject of his own ill-health.

"Of what use to send flannel and *dewai* for my ailments one day and another day bring me into a fever like this? Here"—he put out a shaking hand—"I will look at those papers."

But Yar Mahomed, startled by so unexpected a concession, hastily interposed. "Why endanger your Majesty's health to no purpose? And why should we be plagued with papers while asking none of this fellow in return? What assurance is ours that, having secured my signature, he will be able to produce the money at all?"

It was a cunning suggestion, and Kamrān pounced upon it with avidity. "True talk.—What assurance have *we*? Bring the money here to-morrow. *Then* it shall be seen."

"Your Highness knows quite well that is impossible,"

answered Pottinger, battling with a mad impulse to fly at the throat of Yar Mahomed Khan.

"Plague me no more, then, with papers and promises," thundered the royal invalid; and the next instant sank back among his cushions, his pock-marked face livid with unfeigned exhaustion. "You see!—Leave me. I am too ill for further talk. But by all the names of God, I will commit what tyranny I choose, and levy taxes by every means in my power—until the day you bring me that money in full."

For answer, Eldred Pottinger saluted. "Your Majesty has spoken. It is enough," said he; and straightway departed, "unconquering, yet unconquered," as the sequel proved.

III

All too soon the results of that brief talk at the citadel descended upon the long-suffering people of Herāt.

Timidly, tentatively—encouraged by Pottinger's zeal for their welfare—they had begun feeling their way towards a more normal fashion of life. Shattered houses and shops were being gradually repaired. With the help of money advanced by Pottinger, in the name of his Government, merchants once more sat hopefully among grain-bags and bales; and the sinister traffic of the slave-dealer had been scotched at least, though not killed. Men breathed more freely. Women and children more readily ventured abroad. But now—in the flicker of an eyelid and without visible cause—all was changed.

On the 20th the British officers had gone up to the citadel. On the 21st the word went forth. Taxes were to be levied as aforetime; gate-tolls enforced upon all caravans; and the town duties were again cried aloud at the Pae-i-Takht. Within a day or two, siege prices prevailed; panic bewilderment paralyzed trade activity and renewed the general exodus of citizens fleeing blindly from the wrath to come.

The uphill work of five weeks seemed clean wiped out in as many days. Tyranny and Yar Mahomed Khan held the field; the latter ably seconded by Shere Mahomed, of Ghoriān notoriety. He, whom the Wazir had disowned for surrendering a fortress—still occupied by the Persian rearguard—had since been rewarded with the governorship of a province. And now—within six weeks

of rejoicing at the discomfiture of the Shah-in-Shah, behold the Afghan brothers reunited against the encroachment of a power that threatened to overrule their own; nay more, communicating, unabashed, with the Persian general on the frontier.

But Shere Mahomed, politic always, disapproved of an open breach with the British representative till the ground were firmer under their feet. On the 21st, therefore, he appeared at Pottinger's quarters, inquired anxiously after his health, and tendered apology for high language used at their last interview. Whereto Pottinger returned the characteristic answer that his language signified nothing; his recent conduct—much; that, for his own part, he valued acts before words, however eloquent. And the Afghan, who had scarce one honest act to his credit, went away sorrowful; while Eldred Pottinger reverted to paragraph 27 of a formidable "demi-official," detailing current events for the benefit of a Government secretary two thousand miles off: a secretary ignorant of the country and the people, yet empowered to issue impracticable instructions which the man on the spot—intimately acquainted with both—must by some means contrive to obey.

That last week of October was a dismal one for the people of Herāt and for the British officers, who had hoped against hope to rescue them from the worst of their miseries. Others besides Shere Mahomed came secretly to excuse themselves for carrying out orders they dared not disregard. Openly, all who valued their skins must appear to support the tyrant.

On the 25th came the Chief Eunuch himself, eager—in Pottinger's phrase—to "accommodate the difference." But it speedily transpired that all the accommodation

was to be on Pottinger's side; and in that respect he was adamant. He demanded justice and upright government; neither more nor less. He was too innately Western to realize that he might as well have asked the sea to have mercy on the shore as ask a Yar Mahomed to have mercy on those that were in his power: and the Hāji, deputed only to demand, not concede, also went away sorrowful of countenance, if not of heart.

That evening Allah Dad Khan reported a fugitive, who sought asylum in the house of the Sahibs: a Persian prisoner, secretly kept back by one of Yar Mahomed's Sultans, when the rest had been returned, by order, to the camp. Pottinger, hot against all that savoured of slavery, wrote at once to the Wazir requesting that the offender be publicly punished by way of warning. The request was ignored; but the prisoner, in charge of his own servant, was sent to Ghoriān.

So tyranny pursued its course unchecked; and not tyranny alone. Pottinger soon learned that Yar Mahomed and his brother had recently sent a party of retainers to Ghoriān with overtures of friendship and presents for the Shah and his Wazir. In return came a dress of honour and a letter to the Minister, bidding him dismiss the Englishmen that all might be well between Persia and Herāt. But if the officers stayed, then surely would the Asylum of the Universe return like the cuckoo with the tulips and the apple-blossoms.

Meantime, in the town and outlying villages, matters were going rapidly from bad to worse. The renewal of gate-tolls and the rapacity of Yar Mahomed's followers without the walls effectually scared away indispensable caravans of grain and provisions. Rapine and disorder flourished without let or hindrance, since no man dared lift his voice against a follower of the Wazir.

For more than a week Stoddart and Pottinger stood aside unwillingly enough.

"Give the scoundrel rope to hang himself with," said Stoddart; and both would cheerfully have assisted at the operation.

But there came a point at which Pottinger's exacting conscience rebelled against further acquiescence in evils he had publicly denounced. Moreover, Stoddart must needs be moving on to Bokhara, and was loth to leave his comrade in so critical a strait. Followed the practical question: How far was Kamrān aware of it all? And with a view to solving the problem Pottinger drew up a formal representation containing seven specific charges against Yar Mahomed; amply proven, every one. To these he added an appeal, simple and forcible enough to have stirred any ruler whose heart was not located in his bronchial tube.

"My business," it ran, "is to inform you of the true state of affairs and always to get you the support of the British Government. But if the Wazir continues to oppress the people in the manner described above, it is impossible for your Majesty's kingdom to exist. The English have every desire that, through the grace of God, your Majesty may continue to rule. They delivered your Majesty from the hands of a foreign foe. But now an internal enemy is causing you ruin. Let me tell your Majesty that in your whole kingdom there is not a single person, be he a Khan or a common subject, who is satisfied with the manner in which the Wazir is discharging his duties. . . . I submit that some order may be introduced into the affairs of the State. I also submit that when assistance is received from the British Government there will be no difficulty in remedying all this. Is it difficult for your Majesty to remit the taxes, so that your

poor subjects may get some relief? Is it difficult for your Majesty occasionally to invite the Durrani Khans to the city and balm their wounded hearts? I pray God that He may shower His mercy on your Majesty, and that the policy of His creatures may coincide with the will of Heaven."

Without question the paper must be delivered in person, though dignity might resent a return, unsummoned, to the scene of defeat. On the morning of the 30th, then, they betook themselves to the Citadel, where they found the Shah engrossed in debating the points of a horse. Pottinger, determined to avoid fruitless talk, chose an opportune moment to come forward and present his paper, merely remarking that on account of the language used at their last interview, he had not since waited on his Majesty.

Kamrān inclined his head with a regal aloofness, tucked the paper into the folds of his *kummerbund*, and the officers withdrew.

Evening brought no summons from the Citadel, and morning no news, save that the Shah and a party of chiefs were to go out riding in the environs. By way of informal reminder the officers decided to join his train; and if opportunity arose Stoddart would present a pair of detonating pistols, a parting gift already promised to the King.

It was a clear, crisp morning of October, with that first hint of frost in the air which quickens the blood in a man's veins and magically affects his spiritual barometer. Surfeited with inaction, both felt eager for the outing, glad to escape the misery-laden atmosphere of the streets, uplifted to a renewed confidence in the "ultimate decency of things," which certain days have a miraculous power to impart.

"Hullo!" cried Stoddart, as they neared the drawbridge. "What's in the wind *now*? Such a formidable battalion looks more like war than sport!"

For at the entrance gate a strong body of the Wazir's troops had been drawn up, and the officers learnt that he himself, with an escort, had gone on to the Citadel. They learnt also, to their disappointment, that the King had been too unwell in the night to ride with the chiefs as arranged. Their informant being Hāji Ferōz, Peacemaker-in-ordinary, Stoddart spoke of the pistols and of his wish to present them. His Majesty had never seen a detonator, and had expressed eagerness to know how they worked; for in his younger days he had been a sportsman of note. A messenger was sent up, and soon returned with the desired summons.

"Go forward, O friends of justice and protectors of the poor—and may peace go with you!" quoth the Eunuch, with an unctuous gesture of blessing; and Pottinger echoed the wish from his heart.

In the Hall of Audience a couple of Yar Mahomed's Sultans sat gossiping on a rug. He had taken good care to precede them and secure a few minutes' private talk with the King.

"So much for our chance of a fair hearing," muttered Stoddart.

Pottinger nodded, frowning, and they went in.

The royal invalid, propped against cushions, greeted them more coldly than the day before. Formal inquiries after his health elicited a recital of distressful symptoms unceremoniously checked by the Wazir, who nodded parenthetically at the intruders and continued his discussion of the letters from Ghoriān, commenting as freely on their contents as though the British officers were thin air.

For a while the Shah listened with an abstracted frown, then, turning abruptly to Pottinger, he drew out yesterday's folded paper and shook it almost in the writer's face.

"Think shame of yourself, Pottinger Sahib, to bring hither such false accusations at the bidding of others—jealous, doubtless, and desiring to work evil undetected. It is well known to you that every act of Yar Mahomed is by my order. Yet you thrust upon me these idle tales, merely to make division between my royal self and this my Wazir, without whose zeal and fidelity in my service the whole kingdom would fall in pieces."

Pottinger set his teeth and answered nothing. The looks of both men warned him that the atmosphere was electrical with storm. But the Shah, unappeased by silence, rounded on Stoddart, coughing violently and reiterating his grievance.

"You give nothing but trouble, both of you. I told that fellow last week that I approved of all the Wazir's acts, and will continue my own system till he gives me money. What do you mean, then—bringing these false charges?"

"If they were false, your Highness, they would not be in that paper," Stoddart retorted bluntly, angered on Pottinger's account and regardless always of Asiatic etiquette. "Moreover, some of the acts complained of have no connection with your present system. The case of that Persian prisoner, for instance——"

"He was *not* a prisoner," snapped Yar Mahomed, showing his teeth like a vicious animal. "You *lie*."

The direct challenge infuriated Stoddart beyond control. "By God, it's *you* that are the liar!" he shouted, and in that moment the suppressed mutual hatred of weeks flashed out like a sword whipped from its sheath. "Have

you no manhood in your heart that first you fleece the people and then make untrue statements to the King?" Without staying for an answer he turned hotly upon Kamrān. "The truth of the matter is that your Majesty is being fooled by this man who, for all his smooth speech, is a traitor—a liar—and a dog."

At that the Afghan sprang forward with a smothered snarl of rage. If a glance could kill, the Englishman would have left the Citadel feet foremost; and well had it been for Charles Stoddart had he died there and then. For although Yar Mahomed withheld his hand on that 31st of October, it was only that he might strike more slowly and secretly in the end.

But before he could speak, the Shah, choking with passion, had flung back the charge in Stoddart's teeth. "*Bismillah!* How dare you insult my Wazir to my very face," he thundered: and Stoddart, nothing abashed—

"It was *he* who first insulted me; and I take not such words without retort from any man living."

But Kamrān waved him aside. "I care nothing for that—nothing. It is all false. You are liars, both of you. Never speaking a word of truth since you came. Promising aid; promising money; but giving nothing, while my people starve because of taxes I cannot forgo——"

And so on and so forth, *da capo*, *fortissimo;* till Stoddart, weary of waiting for a pause, fired vigorous protests into the main volley of sound, and Yar Mahomed, outvieing both, shouted fiercely at no one in particular: "In God's name what have these English done after all that they should dictate to us in our own city?"

No one answered him. All three men spoke at once

without the smallest concern for what another might say; and Pottinger, after a few unregarded attempts at more placable speech, stood aside—half anxious, half disgusted—wondering what would be the outcome of it all.

In the end Shah Kamrān's bronchial tube settled the matter. With one comprehensive curse upon all Feringhis he sank among his cushions fighting for breath. Stoddart, sick of futile undignified recrimination, drew out the detonating pistols and laid them before him. "I have brought these," he said, "in accordance with my promise. I will show your Majesty how to work them and then take my leave."

"This is the *first* time that you kept a promise," his Majesty commented ungraciously. But at sight of the coveted weapons a spark from the ashes of his dead youth gleamed in his eyes; and during Stoddart's brief demonstration the tension relaxed. But Yar Mahomed, loth or unable to leave well alone, soon reverted to the Persians, and crowned his insolence by reading aloud, with emphatic gusto, letters received from the Wazir at Tehrān. These were full of insinuations against the British; threats of a return in the spring if their officers were not dismissed; fulsome assurance that Persia counted upon Shere Mahomed Khan; and underlying all, the frank assumption of a sovereignty which, six months earlier, both men had appeared readier to die than to admit. Such is the way of high politics in the East!

"You hear, now, the wisdom of the Shah-in-Shah," Yar Mahomed urged, with a leer under his eyelids at the two officers. "Better agree. He will give you a country worth four of this."

The Shah's non-committal grunt signified nothing one way or the other; and the Wazir, seeing that Pottinger still intended to stand his ground, abruptly left the room.

With a sign of exasperation Kamrān leaned back again, and the silence that ensued contrasted ominously with the ungoverned outburst that had gone before. It lasted several minutes. Then Eldred Pottinger—the one man who had kept his head and his temper throughout—stepped forward and spoke.

Straightly, yet without heat, he protested against the ingratitude and injustice of so grossly libelling those who had come to him in the simple discharge of their duty, hoping that a plain statement of facts might convince him of the Wazir's misrule, and of his many broken promises, which were the true cause of all that had occurred. He reviewed, briefly, his own acts since his arrival in the city.

"And if in all these months I have ever broken faith or spoken an untrue word," he concluded, on a deeper note of feeling, "I beg you only to name the occasion, that I may answer for myself. At the same time let me assure your Majesty that both Colonel Stoddart and I would sooner give up our lives than disgrace, in any way, the country we serve or those whose name we bear. Let me entreat you also, in the name of the God of mercy, to consider what I have said and have pity upon your starving, suffering people. For in our Book of Books it is written that 'the merciful man doeth good to his own soul; but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.'"

It was a long speech for Pottinger; but although he had kept his head, his heart was hot in him, because of the Wazir's conduct and the misery of those unfortunates, in whose cause he could not choose but spend himself so long as his word carried weight in Herāt. Stoddart, cooler by this time, added a few words to the same effect: and Kamrān nodded in sullen acquiescence.

"Yes—yes. Doubtless you have right; and the people

also. In this ruined city there is not enough for all. Therefore if I am to ease the burden of those others you must give me money for myself; and if you desire *my* good-will, you must be at one also with Yar Mahomed Khan."

He signified with a gesture that the Wazir be recalled; and he came without haste or cordiality, the shadow of storm still in his eyes.

"See here, my friend," urged Kamrān, without zest. "These officers have spoken. There is misunderstanding. Can it not be set right?"

"No. That is fool's talk," Yar Mahomed answered straightway. "Better by far to treat with the Persians than endure the language used by these men."

Upon that conclusive statement dead silence fell.

In the face of such deliberate hostility further argument were obviously unavailing, and with a formal salute the British officers took their leave.

As they crossed the Hall of Audience Shere Mahomed Khan entered, exchanged greetings, and passed on into the royal presence. A trivial circumstance; but when the destinies of men hang nicely in the balance, it needs but a grain of sand to turn the scale.

IV

THEIR homeward walk through the dirt and desolation of the city was a silent one. The early nip had gone out of the air, the faint light of hope out of their hearts. Arrived at their lodgings they sat them down and confronted the situation, not without an underlying sense of the ironic humour of it all. Only seven short months ago they had been exerting themselves fruitlessly to bring about some sort of understanding between Persia and Herāt, while Shere Mahomed was repudiated as a traitor. And now, behold that very understanding achieved in their despite, and they themselves threatened with loss of life, or, at least, dismissal from the city for which they laboured unsparingly—to this end.

Stoddart flung aside his turban and passed impatient fingers through his hair.

"Well? This is a pretty state of affairs! I'm sorry I lost my temper, but not sorry I told that blackguard what I think of him. You know their engaging little ways better than I do. What do you make of it all?"

Pottinger considered a moment. "I think," he said slowly, "that the brothers mean to break with us and accept Persia's conditions, sovereignty included, and I tell you frankly I was thankful to get *you* undamaged out of the Citadel."

"H'm, yes. I suppose it was touch and go when Yar Mahomed flew out at me. I don't doubt the brutes would murder us if they dared."

"And I don't doubt they *will*, if it suits their conveni-

ence," Pottinger answered, as imperturbably as if he had stated a fact about the weather.

"Nonsense, man!" laughed Stoddart, and his laughter had a touch of uneasiness, but no shadow of fear. "For myself it's conceivable. But you!—it would be too barefaced. Look at all you've done for them!"

Pottinger shrugged his shoulders and opened his journal. He had lived for more than a year with Yar Mahomed Khan.

And evening brought a letter from the Citadel which justified his conviction. It purported to be from Shah Kamrān, and its language was as unequivocal as a blow between the eyes.

Literally translated it ran thus—

> "Be it known to you, Mr. Stoddart and Mr. Pottinger, that since your arrival in this country you have offered many indignities to the Afghans. These dwellers of the desert have so great a sense of honour that they would rather die than put up with an insult; while you have become so impudent as to call the Wazir in my presence a liar and a dog. It is quite possible that you may be killed. I therefore order you to quit my territory. You must not remain here. You must go."

That the threat of murder was no empty one Pottinger learnt not long after, when he was told, on good authority, that the Shah and Wazir had decided on putting both officers to death, and had only been dissuaded by Shere Mahomed on the ground that dismissal would be more politic and serve the same end.

Pottinger read this note twice over, then handed it to his friend. "That's plain enough," said he, "and upon my soul it's a relief. If my presence is to be of no service

to Government or to these unhappy people, I could ask nothing better than leave to shake the dust of this blighted city off my feet and take the road once more."

"The sooner the better," agreed Stoddart, handing him back the royal missive. "If I were in your shoes I'd not exchange another word with them, even to save my life!"

While he spoke Pottinger was writing out a receipt for the letter and a request that a couple of guides be sent next day to escort them in safety to the frontier. But in spite of peremptory orders to quit, several days passed before these were forthcoming, and during the interval there occurred an incident so characteristic of Pottinger as to be worth recording.

Word came to him of an order from the Wazir that one of his Sultans, lately attached to Stoddart, should be tortured to death, presumably on account of the man's gratitude to the Englishman, who had once saved his life. Pottinger himself had doubted the Sultan's integrity while in their service; but his plight, and the assurance of his friends that only a word from Pottinger Sahib could save him, prevailed. Regardless of the open breach between them, Pottinger went straight to Yar Mahomed's house, rescued the man by offering to enlist him in his own service, and before leaving spoke a few private words of warning to the Wazir.

"I told him," he wrote in his letter to Government, "that as he had quarrelled with me, not with the State, he had better . . . throw himself on the clemency of the Governor-General, and neither fight nor rejoin with Persia, either of which courses must ensure him and his family inevitable ruin. That advice he said he would follow, and would never quarrel with the British Govern-

ment. I replied that he must change his conduct greatly or that would certainly come to pass."

Whether or no this last remark set Yar Mahomed thinking, it is certain that next evening came a message to the officers' lodgings, suggesting that Colonel Stoddart should call on the Minister before leaving Herāt.

That gentleman's comment on the proposal was, as may be imagined, brief and very much to the point. Pottinger supplemented the refusal by adding that the Wazir could expect nothing else after an insult for which no apology had been offered. He learnt incidentally that the Shah was heartily ashamed of his behaviour; that neither had the least intention of parting with him, and were prepared to make any apologies he pleased, once Colonel Stoddart was gone.

"That is as it may be," returned Pottinger, no wise impressed by this mark of royal favour. "To-day I accompany Stoddart Sahib one march out on his journey, returning next day to make preparation for my own."

Thus on the 5th of November, 1838, without further exchange of compliments, Charles Stoddart left Herāt;—its five gates closed and guarded to check the wholesale exodus that threatened directly the news of dismissal reached the people's ears.

The twelve-mile march to Parwāna was pure relief to Englishmen cooped up over-long in the unsavoury atmosphere of an Afghan city. The blessed sense of freedom, the sheer expanse of hill and valley, the winter sunshine and crisp, clean air swept the cobwebs out of their brains, the gloomy forebodings out of their hearts, saddened though they were at sight of the widespread defacement wrought by a seemingly futile siege. Gardens and esplanades, mosques, no matter how sacred or ancient,

all had been sacrificed to the wanton lust of destruction. Where orchards had clustered, the earth was grimly disfigured by stubble of blackened stumps; nor had one among the countless magnificent plane trees—the glory of the valley—been left to beautify the land in spring.

But the travellers had matters more personal to discuss before they parted: Stoddart's chivalrous mission on behalf of Russian captives, very characteristic of the period, when the long revolt against all forms of slavery had but lately reached its triumphant end; Pottinger's homeward route through Seistan and his hope that he might be of service at Kandahar, if rumours of Shah Shujah's re-instatement were true.

They slept that night at Parwāna and parted at dawn, each commending the other to God's good Providence, as even Englishmen could do without false shame in that day of a simpler, surer faith in the Great Unseen. Then each went upon his way—alone among aliens, and inimical aliens; yet no wise disconcerted, because, for both, the promise made to Joshua, in the beginning of days, was a promise for all time: "Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for I, the Lord, am with thee."

So they believed in the year 1838, and both had need of their belief to uphold them through that which was to come.

Eldred Pottinger rode thoughtfully back to Herāt; regret at his failure to achieve the impossible mitigated by relief at the near prospect of escaping into a cleaner moral atmosphere; while Stoddart rode northward through the mountains to Bokhara, congratulating himself on escaping intact from tne neighbourhood of Yar Mahomed Khan.

But, although he guessed it not, congratulation was

premature. For there travelled in his train a servant secretly paid by the Wazir to deliver a letter from himself to the Bokhara chief: a letter that conspired with Stoddart's disregard of local customs, and his arrogant, unbending temper, to bring about the slow years of imprisonment and brutality that culminated in a violent death. And not his own merely. For with him died his would-be liberator Arthur Conolly, loveable and beloved, even of Asiatics, whose practices he fearlessly denounced and whose religion he dreamed of dethroning from its supremacy in Central Asia.

There are few more pitiful chapters in Anglo-Indian history than the story of that double imprisonment, of the indignities, the misery and suspense endured before death released those two isolated officers, seemingly abandoned to their fate by a country very much occupied with matters of greater moment.

And through it all Stoddart's pride and haughty temper appear to have militated against their chances of merciful treatment or ultimate rescue. A Russian officer, with whom he spent four months, between his first and second periods of imprisonment, declared that never was man more imperious and touchy, more unfitted to deal with Asiatics than Colonel Stoddart; brave, resolute and highly accomplished gentleman though he was. From earliest days until now it is the men of his temperament who have stirred up and stimulated that under-current of race hatred, which the finest spirits on both sides so heartily deplore.

At this time Stoddart might have left Bokhara with the help of his host, but he looked that the British Government should come to his aid; and, although his own mission concerned the liberation of Russian captives, he resented the idea of owing his release to their Emperor.

Verily, pride is a luxury for which a man may pay too dear!

Only once does his resolute spirit appear to have been completely broken—for a time. Not long after his arrival he fell foul of the Minister, who treacherously invited him to his house, where he was seized, bound, dragged through the streets by torchlight and lowered into a well alive with vermin and inhabited by Afghan murderers and thieves. After two hideous months spent in their company, he conformed outwardly to the Mahommedan faith and was restored to the light of day.

But in time the natural temper of the man reasserted itself; nor did his concession in the matter of religion avail to save his life, when—three years after—news of a retreating and massacred British army gave the Bokhara chief courage to strike the final blow.

It is said that, at the hour of execution, he sent word to the Amir that he died no Moslem, but a Christian at heart; while Conolly, offered his choice between death and apostasy, made answer stoutly: "Stoddart became a Mussalman and him you have killed. I am prepared to die."

And so an end of Charles Stoddart and Arthur Conolly; brave spirits both, whatever their failings: two units merely, among the scores of good men and true who had, by that time, been sacrificed to the Simla Cabinet's hypothetical "great game" in Central Asia.

V

Eldred Pottinger's lonely return to Herāt was not enlivened by the desolate aspect of the city, that smote him the more sharply after his respite from its distressful atmosphere. Streets empty and silent as in the worst days of the siege; half completed shops and houses deserted by the builders who had been cheerfully at work there a week ago; bread at famine prices, sheep already scarce.

Nor did the news that greeted him prove more reassuring. Two large grain *Kafilas*, it was said, had turned back within one march of the city on hearing that the Sahibs were to leave. The road to Kandahar, Persia and Turkestan swarmed with fugitive Herātis; for the Wazir had been obliged to rescind his order in regard to the gates. Furious at being foiled, he had straightway despatched soldiers experienced in brutality to waylay his unappreciative subjects, strip them and turn them loose to die of cold by the roadside.

Hearing these things and knowing himself debarred from action, the heart of Eldred Pottinger was torn between compassion for this people, that were as sheep not having any shepherd, and the natural longing to be gone from sight and sound of misery he was powerless to relieve. Tired with two days' marching, and disheartened by seeming failure, he could come at no definite decision that night as to the line of future conduct demanded by his threefold duty to Government, to his suffering fellow-creatures and to his own self-respect.

Next morning his room was thronged with friends—Afghan, Hindu and Herāti—eager to bid him welcome and enliven him with gossip from the Citadel, whence he was cut off.

Said one who had spoken with Yar Mahomed himself: "Think not to depart, O champion of the distressed, and grieve the hearts of your friends! Already the Wazir Sahib hath suffered abuse from the Shah for quarrelling with the English before the friendship of Persia was secure."

And from without came news of more stirring import. The Kandahar chiefs, it was rumoured, had received twelve thousand ducats from Russia, with a promise of thirty thousand more, and were already moving on Herāt; while a Hindu merchant eclipsed all by announcing the imminent advance of a great British force from Ferōzepore, "an event," said he, "that is prayed for publicly by all classes of people."

Thus, and in this fashion, did Eldred Pottinger receive the first tidings of that "great game" wherein he was to play so noble yet so harassing a part. And, at the moment, no news could have been more welcome. Like too many men of that day he believed in the divine right of the Saddozai dynasty; and in any case, word of an approaching British army would no doubt have a salutary effect on the attitude of his friends in the Citadel. They were obviously temporizing to detain him till Persia should vouchsafe an answer to their second proffer of alliance; and as he had insisted on sending two of his own men with Stoddart across the mountains, he had no wish to leave till they brought word of his friend's arrival on the farther side. Without seeming, therefore, to regard Yar Mahomed's politic remorse, he gave out that his departure was unavoidably postponed; and on the 12th

the arrival of two Persian chiefs promised a more definite development one way or the other.

It took the form of a note from the Arz Begi [1] next morning, begging that Pottinger would go with him to the Minister's house and bring dissension to an end. The request amounted to an admission that yesterday's interview had failed; and Pottinger, deeming that an additional twinge of anxiety might not be amiss, sent answer that without a written recall he doubted whether he would admit the Wazir to his quarters, much less honour him with a visit.

Result, a personal appeal from the Officer of Justice himself—a proven friend, honest enough to admit that in spite of Colonel Stoddart's injudicious outburst, the British officers had right on their side. Moreover, he had boldly urged the Wazir not to disgrace the name of Afghan by an open breach with one who had never spared himself in their service; and Yar Mahomed, in return, had sworn by all the names of God that his quarrel was not with the defender of Herāt, but only with the man who had miscalled him before the King.

Pottinger listened till all was said, then he remarked quietly, "I am glad that you at least believe I have acted for the best. But has it not struck you, my friend, that the Wazir's regrets touch the slightest matter only; while he ignores, for his own convenience, the real cause of it all. Regret or no regret, how should a few empty compliments and promises undo evil already done? How shall the fugitive citizens be recalled, the broken promises patched up, the violated pledges restored? As for their fashion of requiting my services, that is a trifle by comparison, though discreditable enough, as you know without telling——"

[1] Officer of Justice.

"True, O Pottinger Sahib," the peacemaker interposed eagerly. "But is there not forgiveness, even with Allah, when men profess sorrow for past misdeeds?"

The Englishman shrugged his shoulders. "To say truth, I need something more practical than professions. They are nothing but false coin in the mouth of Yar Mahomed Khan. You yourself have seen how he will make promises in Allah's name here under my roof, and break them before reaching his own door. The fact that we worked and fought together for so long has made me more forbearing than he deserved. But by now he has exhausted even *my* patience."

"Nay, my friend, that is not the answer I desire. Have you no regard for the Wazir's entreaty that you should consider, at least, your own welfare and the interests of your country that will sustain great loss if this city should succumb to Russia or Irān?"

At the cunning of that final plea Pottinger laughed outright.

"Since when has Yar Mahomed grown so solicitous of my welfare and the interests of my country that he must needs entreat *me* to consider both! You can assure him from me that, in comparison with the last, the first does not signify a straw; though I have no fear that my Government will rebuke me for upholding right and truth even if it should suffer in consequence, which, thank God, it is not likely to do through any piece of inimical folly committed by Shah Kamrān."

"The Sahib hath spoken. It is enough." And fervently reiterating his desire to promote peace, the good man took his leave.

Two days later came a formal note from Yar Mahomed, enclosing letters from the Amir of Kabul to Mahomed Shah and the Russian Envoy, together with the draft of

a treaty between himself and them. No request for advice; no word of apology or recall. And on the 20th Pottinger wrote to Macnaghten, recording events within and rumours without up to that date. Finally, in regard to his own position, he ventured a definite opinion worth quoting in view of after events.

"As I sent two of my men with Colonel Stoddart through the mountains, I am detained till they return, which I expect hourly, as more than a sufficient time has elapsed; and I should feel anxious on that gentleman's account but that he wrote me a note by a messenger telling me of his safe arrival amongst the outliers of the Hazaras. I, at present, can see no way by which I may be able to remain here. The whole conduct of the Government has been so false and outrageous that the wildest fiction falls short of the reality, and their late conduct to Colonel Stoddart and myself, after the labour we have had in their service, makes it painful to think of remaining. This, however, I would not mind if I saw any hope of being able to forward the views of Government, or to be of any use; but the disregard of Kamrān to my advice, and the opposition of Yar Mahomed Khan to everything tending to benefit the country, joined to the experience I have had of their former conduct, and their insulting carriage to myself, show me that my stay will not be productive of advantage; but very probably of the contrary, by lowering their ideas of our honour and character, which I am glad to say they rate highly.

"I intend to return by the road of Seistan, and if possible may stay some time with the chiefs there until I can communicate with Mr. Leech in Khelāt, and hear if I can be of any use in that quarter."

Here surely was an opinion worth considering, seeing that the writer had spent fourteen months in close touch

with the rulers of Herāt. But long before this letter reached Calcutta the future of that city had been mapped out; not in accordance with facts, but in accordance with Macnaghten's over-ambitious policy, which—confessedly or no—aimed at nothing less than Great Britain paramount in Central Asia.

As for Pottinger—before the return of his servants set him free to think seriously of departure, he received letters from Simla that left him no choice but to remain and accept anything in the shape of an apology that Yar Mahomed might be disposed to honour him withal.

Macnaghten wrote from Simla, enclosing a fulsome letter from Lord Auckland to Shah Kamrān wherein the royal invalid—sodden with drink and drugs—found himself belauded for his "noble resistance," and for having "driven back the invading army with all its thousands, its guns, its munition," by the sole strength of his "courage and determination." In the same strain the Governor-General dilated on his zeal for the interests of Kamrān; advocated a firm and lasting bond of friendship with the British Government, and bade the Shah speak freely with his "true friend Lieut. Pottinger," who had already done much to deserve his lordship's approbation.

"No written bond," he concluded, with ingenuous fervour, "can add to my desire to serve you, nor increase my personal respect for your gallant devotion in defence of your country."

Pottinger, knowing too well the exact extent of the said "gallant devotion," folded up that remarkable document with an enigmatic smile. It left him little doubt as to the nature of his own instructions, and reverting to Macnaghten's letter, he learned that he must consider himself attached to the Kabul Mission from October 1, and act under the Envoy's instructions till

further orders. He must impress on the Shah the need of securing himself, at the present critical juncture, to a strong and friendly power, a power zealous for the establishment of prosperity and peace.

"You will try and find out what assistance he would require from Government, and you will encourage his allying himself with us by the assurance that we shall receive his proposals with a liberal spirit. Should money be required you can draw on Captain Burnes for not more than one lakh of rupees" (£10,000).

So much for Yar Mahomed's preposterous demand and for Pottinger's visions of the road. Macnaghten's letter relieved him, at least, from the burden of indecision. It now remained simply to accept the Wazir's apology and devote himself afresh to the thankless task of making bricks without straw. To what end?

VI

Lord Auckland's sugared phrases had at least the effect of paving the way to peace, which Pottinger now began to realize he was expected to keep at any price. Remained the problem, how to combine the keeping of peace with the keeping of his earlier promise—made in the name of the British Government—that justice and exemption from slavery would be enforced while he represented his country at Herāt. Nor were matters simplified by the awkward fact that beyond vaguely worded offers of friendship, Pottinger had no certain knowledge of that country's future intentions, or the still more awkward fact that if any deed of his should chance to hamper those unknown intentions, the blame and responsibility would be on his own head.

And, come what might, there was none at hand with whom he could take counsel. Even his good friend the Hakeem was gone southward on a journey; and the departure of Stoddart had made his isolation complete. The nearest Englishmen were Sir John McNeill at Tehrān, seven hundred and fifty miles off; and at Shikarpore, farther off still, Alexander Burnes, now Lieutenant-Colonel and a knight to boot, intent on coercing Beluchistan chiefs into some show of welcome to Shah Shujah, the Undesired, and his British *cortège:* in his own words, "treaty-making on a great scale . . . and carrying all before me."

From neither of these had Pottinger heard for weeks, and for months no personal packets from India had

arrived to cheer him. For news of the outer world he depended mainly on rumours brought by merchants of caravans, and the sifting of a few possible grains of truth from a haystack of embellishments was tedious and harassing beyond belief. But caravans had become chary of calling since news of the Sahibs' dismissal scared the country-side: a practical compliment to British character, with which Pottinger could very well have dispensed at the moment.

Alone, unaided, and hampered by lack of knowledge, it remained only to use his best discretion and pray that the "laudatory wig" might not be his reward.

Verily and indeed there is no school for manhood comparable to service in these far-off outposts of Empire, where character is fired and moulded, often painfully enough, "in the furnace of responsibility and on the anvil of self-reliance"; where boys in their twenties may be called upon to play the explorer, the soldier, the administrator, by turns or all at once, as circumstances dictate. Pottinger having played the two first, with distinction, was not permitted to escape the third: for him, the least congenial of the three. But in this line of service, as in all he undertook, thoroughness, judgment and tenacity of purpose were the outstanding qualities of his work. Not often—even in the varied vicissitudes of political pioneering—has it fallen to the lot of a British subaltern, barely seven-and-twenty, to cope single-handed with a Yar Mahomed Khan: a man of nearly twice his age and ten times his experience; more than his equal in ability and strength, with the fiend's own cunning superadded, and never the ghost of a scruple to hamper him in word or deed.

Pottinger, sitting late into the night—alone with his thoughts and his problem—saw before him a struggle

compared with which the struggle for Herāt had been mere child's play; saw, too, that his position—though strengthened by Government sanction—was actually harder to maintain than during the siege. Then, all causes of internal dissension had been merged in concerted action against the common foe; now, when policy demanded even closer co-operation with those in authority—the very credit of his country and his own promise to the people compelled an attitude of continual opposition, except in the matter of supplying funds for the restoration of tillage and trade. For this reason, and this reason alone, did Yar Mahomed accept Lord Auckland's tenders of friendship, and tolerate the presence of a British agent at Herāt; a significant fact not to be lost sight of throughout all the complications that ensued.

Meantime there remained the practical question—what was to be done next? And before morning Pottinger had decided upon a line of action that might enable him to keep the peace and hold his own till Government saw fit to grant him the stronger support, without which no foothold could be maintained upon the shifting sands of Afghan friendship.

Since there was plainly no hope of forcing the Wazir to deal justly and humanely by his people, Pottinger resolved to temporize, on condition that none of his measures be considered binding and that judgment on the Wazir's questionable conduct be left for Government to pronounce.

A note to this effect brought a converted Yar Mahomed to his quarters next morning. Here they discussed matters amicably and with excellent result. Pottinger proposed that the collecting of taxes and the dispensation of justice be placed entirely in his own hands, while the Wazir should positively undertake to forgo treasonous

correspondence with foreign states and suppress slave dealing in all the region under his dominion.

Yar Mahomed assented without demur; and therewith Pottinger addressed himself in earnest to work demanding all his energies; work that came as a blessed relief after a spell of inaction aggravated by increasing desolation, as week followed week and no word of greeting came to him from those he loved in India or at home. True, his uncle wrote regularly once or twice a month, but so unsettled was the state of the whole country beyond Kabul, that many letters went hopelessly astray, while the rest would arrive at long intervals in batches of two and three, quite irrespective of their dates of despatch.

And now, as Christmas drew near—with its sacred memories and irresistible tug at the heart-strings—the unacknowledged ache became harder to ignore, and work, however harassing, a gift of the gods. The intricacies of tax settlements and the dispensing of justice—when delinquents could be run to earth—left little enough time for letters to Government and none for private anxieties. At the Pae-i-Takht he was loyally supported by his friend the Arz Begi; and his reappearance there had an immediate effect upon the outward flowing stream that had threatened to empty the city.

The tax question was more complex, demanding a nice balance of judgment and tact. Total abolition were worse than useless. The money would merely be extorted, in secret, by the followers of Yar Mahomed and his chiefs. Wherefore he decided to reinforce town duties at a moderate rate, and to levy taxes in the Shah's name, while privately assuring the crippled citizens that all money so taken would be regarded as a loan, and repaid if the Herāt Government kept its promises as regards slavery and foreign intrigue. A portentous "if" for

any who had intimate experience of that Government and its ways.

But British dominion in the East can boast few greater assets than implicit belief in the good faith and unlimited power of the Shah. By means of this asset, coupled with his own tact and firmness, Pottinger speedily set his placable measures in such rough working order as conditions would allow.

Nor did he confine himself to civic problems only. The abiding tenderness of the true soldier, for all that are desolate and oppressed, impelled him to ceaseless exertion on behalf of the very poorest, the sub-stratum of starving, homeless, human creatures who thronged the by-ways and windowless houses, and who cared nothing for taxes or justice, but cried aloud for bread. Under his direct supervision, more than a thousand of these were fed daily in the market-place, on the only food procurable: a very coarse broth of *jowaree* and millet boiled up with salt and fat from the *doomba* sheep. This unpalatable decoction was devoured as if it had been nectar of the gods; and for those who tasted little or nothing between whiles, its distribution was the supreme event of the day. Among this destitute remnant were countless orphans, and to these Pottinger's heart went out with peculiar tenderness. No less than forty of them he saved from slavery and kept under his personal care while he remained in Herāt. On leaving he commended them to Major Todd, with the result that they were decently educated and taught trades for their own support. Six he took with him to Calcutta and placed in the College of Medicine, where Conolly had placed his good friend the Hakeem.

For in Eldred Pottinger the two-fold zeal of the soldier and philanthropist—a combination less uncommon than

it may sound—burned with no less fervour than in Henry Lawrence himself: and although history may remember him as the defender of Herāt, it is probable that the citizens for whom he wrought remembered him rather as their saviour. Such is the world's way. The defence was more effective, and of greater political moment. Hence it stands recorded in full. But beyond tributes from Sir John Login and Sir John Kaye—and a small after-crop of criticisms, such as no Afghan "political" of that time could escape—there remains scant record of his arduous struggle against injustice and brutality, slavery and famine. Only from letters, private and official, have the details of that struggle been gleaned and set down for the satisfaction of those who prize high-hearted impulse and effort no whit less than material achievement.

Not that the four months following upon the Persian retreat had been destitute of achievement. Far from it. By the end of December—despite passing interludes of paralysis and panic—trade and tillage had been revived; the taxes reduced to a minimum; much suffering redressed; rough justice set on foot. And although this timid renewal of life flourished under the lee of a human volcano, it was no small matter that for a space the people had leisure to breathe and barter and pray; for a space, at least, there was peace in the land.

VII

But prolonged peace under the rule of Yar Mahomed Khan was a miracle past praying for.

Early in January Pottinger discovered that the Wazir had secretly despatched a caravan of slaves with a grain *Kafila* that had left the city a few days before. The news roused him to a white heat of indignation. Of all Yar Mahomed's favourite sins this was the one he most strenuously opposed; and now he went straight to the citadel, resolved in his heart that the caravan should be recalled and he himself would go surety for repayment of the money; or, in the last resort, he would threaten to leave Herāt.

But Yar Mahomed in an obdurate mood was a match for any Englishman on earth. The people were his to sell when there was need. Even a low-born had the right to do as he would with his own. Argument, entreaty, threats—all were alike unavailing; and Pottinger, maddened by the covert smile—half insolence, half amusement, at this exhibition of pure Feringhi madness—would fain have struck the man across his cruel mouth. But, in his own words, policy obliged him to restrain his wrath and rest content with a vigorous protest against conduct whereon he was not empowered to pass judgment. The matter would be duly reported to the Indian Government; and there an end—for the time being.

But late that night, as he closed his journal and pushed back his chair, the encompassing silence brought forth a sound unusual at such an hour: a low, insistent knocking at the outer door.

It proved to be his staunch adherent Mirza Ibrahim,

who through all contingencies had borne himself friendly, and who now appeared in some distress of mind.

"Well, Mirza Sahib, to what do I owe this honour?" Pottinger asked, after greetings. "A strange hour for calling; but your visits have always been in the way of friendship."

"As always—so now, helper of the helpless," the man replied, with a deep obeisance. "The heart of the Sahib is hot within him—is it not so?—because my master hath disposed of twenty or thirty useless ones in exchange for money—needful to all?"

And Pottinger: "Yes, my heart *is* hot; not only because of men and women handled and bartered like cattle, but because it is impossible that two men can work together for the same end if the feet of one be set upon a rock, and of the other upon shifting sand."

"Nay, Sahib, for the love of Allah say not impossible," the Afghan pleaded, with genuine fervour. "There be difficulties in this matter beyond what appear; but in truth it is not the desire of my master lightly to break his engagements with your noble country. And hearing there had been some talk of departure, I am come hither in secret to beseech the true friend of Herāt that he will *not* desert this city and this people that, without his aid and championship, had never been lifted from the dust of destruction."

Before the last words were spoken the man had sunk upon his knees, taken off his turban, and laying it at Pottinger's feet in supreme token of appeal, bowed his forehead to the ground. A request so proffered was one that no true-hearted man could resist; moreover, the Afghan had done Pottinger more than one service in the past year, and he was not sorry to have an opportunity of doing him a good turn.

"In respect of leaving Herāt I had come to no

decision," said he. "But now it is otherwise. The good-will of my Government is towards your city; therefore, because this request is *yours* and made in the name of the people—I will stay."

"Praise be to Allah, the compassionate, the merciful!" And the Mirza, rapidly muttering a *fattiyah*, would have saluted Pottinger's feet, but the Englishman raised him by the shoulder.

"It is enough," he said, smiling and presenting the discarded turban. "I owe you a service. I am glad to pay my debt."

"And you will see my master?"

"If he will call on me to-morrow—yes; and if he is prepared to renew his former promises, with better intention of keeping them than heretofore."

It seemed that he was so prepared; and he came accordingly—all suavity and concession. The old ground was gone over for the fiftieth time, the old promises renewed, more for the sake of moral effect than from any real hope that he would keep them a moment longer than a veneer of virtue served his turn.

For the moment, at all events, readjustment was complete; and by now Eldred Pottinger, though by nature ardent and impatient, had learned the invaluable art of living from moment to moment; of concentrating all his energies on the passing day instead of diffusing them by vain attempts to see beyond the horizon.

Meanwhile, with matter-of-fact quietness, he carried on his self-appointed task, appearing daily at the Pae-i-Takht and in the market-place at feeding-time; and within the week there came an official document from Macnaghten which made clear to him, once for all, that whatever Yar Mahomed might do, or leave undone, he himself would be expected to retain his foothold at Herāt.

The letter opened with a formal intimation of his

appointment on a consolidated salary of one thousand rupees a month. It acknowledged the receipt of his first account of events written after the siege, an account "perused with much interest by the Governor-General," who bade his representative "observe the strictest economy" and apply the sum forwarded by Burnes "to the most beneficent purposes."

In truth, the whole document served to increase rather than lighten the burden of responsibility that already weighed heavily on Pottinger's conscientious soul. Stripped of official verbiage, four hopelessly conflicting commands stood out plain and clear: strict economy; the promotion of peace and prosperity; no offence to powerful individuals; no check on the authority of the Wazir. A promising prelude to the reconciling of all parties which he must strenuously endeavour to promote.

Dearly would he have liked, at that moment, to set Mr. Secretary Macnaghten in his own shoes for three months, and then confront him with the query: "How, in the face of four-cornered facts, can these things be?"

But awkward questions and the statement of awkward facts were not in the bond. Moreover Macnaghten, like most ardent theorists, suffered from constitutional short-sightedness in this regard—an infirmity from which Pottinger was ultimately to suffer much and British India more. The two men had small affinity either in temperament or in political outlook; and from the first Pottinger did not relish the prospect of working under the newly-made envoy. As for his own appointment, complimentary though it was, he would rather have been well on his way to China, absorbed in geographical research, and far removed from the subtleties of diplomacy, for which he possessed no natural gift.

His own opinion on the subject transpires in a brief review of his services, written two years later on account

of friction with Macnaghten, who, from first to last—and most often unwittingly—proved a stone of stumbling in his path. The Governor-General, unasked by me, appointed me an assistant of Sir William Macnaghten, with instructions to keep on friendly terms with the Herāt Government, a thing perfectly impossible. Left to myself, as an English subject I could get on very well, but as an agent I could not keep on the jostling, shouldering and retaliatory system by which men of rank hold their own in Afghanistan."

This he already foresaw; yet there could be no question of refusal, of withdrawing his hand from the plough. He supposed that, in time, a mission would be sent to his support and the town fortified, if not garrisoned, to some purpose. Till then the impossible must by some means be achieved—for the sake of the downtrodden Herātis, for the sake of a Government evidently determined to take the whole province under its elastically expansive wing; and above all, for the sake of that dear mother in Ireland, who needed all the practical help he could give her, in view of the chronically unsettled state of his father's affairs.

Thought of his mother revived the haunting question: How and where—in that very hour—was she who had so loved and leaned upon him, even from earliest days? How was she enduring the ache and strain of anxiety long drawn out? Or had she—by any terrible chance——?

But upon that intolerable doubt he sternly slammed the door of his heart, and rising up, went forth into the market-place to banish ghosts and hear the evening's news.

VIII

Letters at last! Letters in handwriting more welcome than that of Mr. Secretary Macnaghten or Sir John McNeill. Two from his uncle; one from his old friend and Commandant Captain Ward; and better than all, one from Ireland—a costly treasure, stamped *2s. 6d.*—addressed in the hieroglyphic, needle-pointed handwriting of John Pottinger, eldest of the eight brothers and sisters who, one after one, were being drawn irresistibly towards the East.

John had returned on sick leave not long since; and Eldred, slipping a penknife round the seal, scanned the crossed sheet to assure himself that all was well. Then he glanced at the heading, "Dublin. Aug. 3rd, 1838." And he who read sat in a mud house in Herāt on the 12th of January 1839. But Anglo-Indians of that day were inured to the casual traffic between East and West, not entirely devoid of compensations, incredible though that may seem to their more impatient grandsons; and Eldred Pottinger, his anxiety set at rest, gave himself up to unhurried enjoyment of his brother's lighter, livelier outlook on men and things.

"My dear Eldred,

"It is now a long time since you and I have exchanged epistles, but I have heard of you from many quarters; all, especially my Uncle Henry, speaking of you in the highest terms of praise; from which I judge you have been successful in your

journey to Khorassan. My uncle mentioned in his last letter to my mother that he had applied to the Governor-General to have you appointed political agent at the court of Sindh. I know it will be opposed by that stupid old fool who *sleeps* 'in the chair of honour'; but I still hope this may find you ensconced in all the dignity of *chargé d'affaires* at Hyderabad, with the salary of fifteen hundred or two thousand rupees a month, which will put you in a fair way of restoring to life the fallen dignity of the House of Pottinger!

"By the way, I may give you a bit of advice: make up your mind not to marry under fifty thousand pounds! The women here make desperate love to me, but when they find I am not heir apparent (query, to what?) it is amusing to see how soon their ardour cools. I am really not joking, though, when I hope to see you some day spliced to a fortune.

"My father has put his affairs, or rather your affairs (the Kilmore property), into the hands of old Alick Stewart, who takes a great interest in you; and, such as it is, it will come to you unencumbered, which is more than I expected. For what my grandfather began my father has finished; and you are the sufferer! . . . But, careless as he has been of your interests and his own, he loves you, Eldred, better than you think; and has, even at the eleventh hour, done all in his power to retrieve his former extravagance; and when I read him my uncle's letter about you, I never saw any person more delighted than he was at hearing your praise.

"I have been in wretched health ever since I came to England; and am now living in lodgings here in order to be near the doctor. . . ."

For the rest, local and family news, welcome, after months of isolation, as the first sun-ray after storm.

Equally welcome, in another fashion, was the first word of congratulation upon his own achievement from Captain Ward, whose faith in him had stimulated his zest for adventurous travel.

> "My dear General," he read—and smiled, even while he glowed at the extravagant compliment—
>
> "A packet goes off this evening to your uncle, and I cannot let it be despatched without congratulating you on all the honours you have gained. Now that you have a little leisure you may look back and be proud of the assistance you have afforded to a gallant and noble defence. You have merited nobly of the British Government both in Europe and Asia; and I trust you may soon have substantial proofs of the high estimation in which your character is held by both parties. The retrograde movement of the Persians and the safety of Herāt will completely change Lord Auckland's plans, I should imagine. I fear he has not been playing the best game in selecting Shah Shujah for our puppet. We might equally well have gained our ends with Dōst Mahomed and without the ruinous expense in which the present plan will involve the country. . . ."

Unhappily, as has been shown, Lord Auckland had seen no reason to cancel his costly enterprise; and Colonel Pottinger's letter, dated the 7th of December, already foreshadowed breakers ahead in Sindh. It foreshadowed also further friction with Sir Alexander Burnes. If he had been a thorn in the flesh aforetime he now threatened to become a serious political obstacle to the man whose forbearance, discretion and restraint went far to save

the army of the Indus from an initial disaster in Sindh.

But for the most part Colonel Pottinger's letter overflowed with fatherly joy and pride in his "dearest Eldred," seasoned with sound advice; and the one, no less than the other, brought unspeakable refreshment of heart to the nephew who loved him as a son.

"I must now, my dear Eldred," he wrote, having briefly dismissed the affairs of Sindh, "congratulate you from the bottom of my heart on the magnificent orders which the Governor-General has issued about you. I have no doubt that you will be knighted and field-officered as soon as your conduct is reported at home. Before I saw the order I wrote to ask what was to become of you. I have since written to Bombay for political kit for you, which I hope to receive in time to forward by the Bengal Army as far as Kandahar. I think of asking Major Todd to take charge of it, so that you can let him know your wishes about its despatch to Herāt. I would strongly advise you to apply to have as great a portion of your allowances as you can spare paid to Forbes and Co., Bombay. It will accumulate in their hands, and when you want it sent to Europe I will manage it for you free of commission. . . .

"Save every rupee you can to buy an estate and re-establish yourself as Head of the Family. We have all reason to be proud of you, and I have been overwhelmed with congratulations from all quarters, at your '*Burra Nám.*' On one point I must warn you. That is, not to advance a rupee to your father, or any of your relations. To him it will do no good; and had you not most generously given up your £5000, your now settling it on your sisters would have been an act worthy of you. . . .

"I am determined you shall *save money*. 'Them's my

sentiments.' I will perhaps add a P.S. when I get to Vikkur.

"God bless you, my dear boy. Take all care of yourself and write to me whenever you have opportunity, if only two lines; as *we are all* most and constantly anxious about you; and I am

"Your most affectionate uncle,

"HENRY POTTINGER."

Certain it is that whatever Eldred Pottinger may have lacked of the lighter and more lucrative qualities that make for popularity, he possessed, in full measure, the supreme gift of commanding love and admiration from all who knew him intimately enough to penetrate the outer shell of modesty and reserve. To this fact almost every surviving letter bears testimony, each in its own fashion.

Of himself, too, it was characteristic that for all his acquiescence in Colonel Pottinger's advice, he sent money home regularly to his mother, from that time onward, till the day of his death; and thereafter a grateful Government voted her a hundred pounds a year in recognition of his services. A notable—and seemingly rare—record this, of a mother-and-son devotion purely spiritual, owing nothing to the tie of blood; the more notable because Eldred Pottinger was, in almost every respect, the child of his own dead mother rather than of his talented but unstable father: and the strength of the bond between them gave an added depth and glow to his young life; an added glory to her own.

Cheered and refreshed beyond measure, he turned hungrily to the packet of newspapers that contained, among other items of interest, the *Gazette*, already quoted, with its substantial compliment and stirring tribute of praise. Thoroughly to absorb and digest his

unwonted feast of good things took time, as also did the letter to his uncle into which he plunged while the glow of contact was still fresh upon him.

So, for a brief, blessed space he escaped in spirit from the harassing strain of life at Herāt; and for that space he had respite from the cry of the hungry and the guile of Yar Mahomed Khan.

IX

Two days later, merged once more in the old inexorable round, he sat again at his table, writing to Macnaghten of his compromise with the Wazir and of the caravan incident: adding by way of self-justification: "I was anxious not to meddle with internal affairs, but felt, if I did not, it would be utterly impossible to stop tyranny and slave dealing, for no one remains who has courage to bring offenders to punishment, and nothing but my appearance in the bazaar at Pae-i-Takht will serve to stop the stream of emigration and induce the people to begin the cultivation of their fields. . . . I have thus briefly described the present state of things, and trust I shall be able to keep them so till support arrives. . . . The Persians are strengthening and provisioning Ghoriān, and have forbidden supplies of grain being sent to Herāt. The Hazaras, and indeed all the other tribes, are quite independent, plundering the roads and making war as they please. . . . Every one is awaiting with anxiety the progress of our army, and at present a single brigade may march unopposed to the banks of the Amoo, if it once pass Kandahar. . . . Sir John McNeill writes that the state of things at Tehrān was very unsatisfactory . . . and that everything in Persia depends on the army of the Indus."

And how was it faring, meanwhile, that army of the high-sounding title borrowed from the bulletins of Napoleon?

Well indeed, for all concerned, could it have borrowed

some of the great emperor's genius for the art of war. But, even from the outset, genius and justice alike were conspicuous by their absence. "The plan of campaign," it is written by Sir Henry Durand, "violated, in a glaring manner, all usual military precautions. Although, in Eastern wars, the leaders of our armies have dared much —yet never before during the history of British power in India had so wild, ill-considered and adventurous a scheme of aggression been entertained."

And the detailed records to be found in every history of the period amply justify a stricture as accurate as it is severe: a stricture that yet reflects no discredit on that able and resolute soldier, Sir Henry Fane. Commander-in-chief though he was, and leader-elect of the entire force, he appears to have been allowed little voice in determining the general scheme of advance, and the man's haughty spirit must have brooked with impatience the crude military ideas of political officers unversed in the very rudiments of war, eager only to achieve their own purposes with the least possible delay, by shutting their eyes to obvious lions in the path. Yet, before any definite advance could be achieved, certain of these lions demanded not merely recognition but coercion, by fair means or foul.

In the first place—owing to the objections of Ranjit Singh—it had been decided to march the main army into Afghanistan through Sindh, regardless of the trifling detail that this would involve a direct breach of treaty with that country whose rulers might well have their own objections to a policy that, being interpreted, signified: Your money or your life!

Weak and wealthy, these princes clung tenaciously to an independence that must succumb in time to Sikh or British power, and straightforward attack, with a view

to annexation, had been honest at least, if more than a little aggressive. But as one lie breeds another, so injustice breeds injustice; and the wrong done to the Amir of Kabul involved further wrong to the Amirs of Sindh, who had reluctantly allowed trade navigation of the Indus on the express condition that it be not used for the transport of military stores. They were now to be told that, in the present crisis, this article of the treaty must be suspended; that in addition they must pay a heavy subsidy, agree to the presence of a reserve force in support of the army, and endure the renewal of an annual tribute to Shah Shujah that had lapsed for thirty years.

Such were the unpalatable orders despatched to Henry Pottinger by the Governor-General, who had succeeded in convincing himself that the Sindh Amirs were treacherous and inimical because, forsooth, they had written a letter full of flowery Eastern compliment to Mahomed Shah, as head of the Shiah sect, and were unwilling to support the claims of an Afghan king long famous for his pretensions to the ownership of Sindh. For these inadequate reasons their co-operation in Lord Auckland's "just and necessary undertaking" was not to be asked: it was to be demanded, enforced, if need be, at the point of the bayonet. Divested of diplomatic draperies, the simple plan of action amounted to this: The Amirs' money was to be taken, their country occupied, their treaties set aside, to the tune of empty phrases anent mutual good-will. And Henry Pottinger—lately promoted from Kutch to Sindh—was called upon, as Resident, to carry out this policy of mingled injustice and aggression, while at the same time avoiding all risk of open hostility that might delay the "grand promenade" by involving it in a preliminary conquest of the country. All things were to be done in friendliness and in order;

yet in all things the will of the British Government must prevail.

It was an anxious and anomalous position for a man more than commonly clear-eyed and high-minded, a man as jealous as his nephew for England's good name in the East. But the fiat had gone forth. Shah Shujah, with his own contingent, had crossed the Indus higher up and marched to Shikarpore. Sir John Keane with five thousand troops had long since set sail from Bombay; while the Bengal army, twenty thousand strong—encumbered with thirty thousand camels and as many camp followers—was marching, under Fane and Sir Willoughby Cotton, from Ferozepore. It behoved Henry Pottinger to play his hand so that this unwieldy mass should pass peaceably through Sindh; and he resolved, in his wisdom, that no word of Lord Auckland's terms should transpire till the arrival of the Bombay troops should enable him to enforce his unpalatable demands.

But he reckoned without Alexander Burnes; and by the end of December found himself in an impasse demanding all the coolness, discretion and forbearance wherewith he was endowed. On the one hand, a Government that either could not or would not perceive the real difficulties involved; on the other, local princes increasingly suspicious and hostile. On the south, Sir John Keane landed at Vikkur only to find himself paralyzed for lack of transport and grain, which a "friendly country" had failed to supply, and thus effectually baulked his junction with the Bengal army, seven hundred and fifty miles off. On the north, in Upper Sindh, Alexander Burnes—elate with his new title and "a little brief authority"—making confusion worse confounded, by harassing his superior officer with drafts of unpracticable treaties, flippant criticisms, and that final crowning indiscretion, the premature

disclosure of Lord Auckland's demands. This last incensed the Amirs, endangered the safety of British officers in Lower Sindh and bid fair to increase tenfold the difficulties with which Pottinger had been struggling for weeks: and all in order that Burnes' own minor affairs up at Khyrpore might be triumphantly settled out of hand.

A sharp reprimand sped up the Indus as rapidly as might be. But the mischief was done past recall. The Amirs were up in arms; the new treaty rejected and Pottinger himself insulted by the men whose confidence he had won against difficult odds. The Beluchis began to assemble in strength at Hyderabad. Hostilities appeared inevitable, and an advance contingent of the Bengal army under Sir Willoughby Cotton arrived in Sindh—with intent to join Macnaghten and his king—must needs hurry southward in support of Pottinger and Sir John Keane at Hyderabad. But the accomplishment of these things took time, and January was over before Sir Willoughby began his southward march. Macnaghten, all impatience for his triumphal entry, learnt with dismay that the troops, without which he could not move, had gone off "on a wild goose chase" to Hyderabad. Such was the multiplex confusion wrought by an injudicious word or two from one man's mouth, and that man, egoist in the grain, openly gloried to Cotton "in having done his utmost to provoke the wrath of the Amirs."

Macnaghten, blind as Lord Auckland as to the actual issues at Hyderabad, saw only the grand enterprise of restoring Shah Shujah to the throne in danger of postponement that might conceivably frustrate all. For near a month he was forced to remain stationary with a king who already began to yearn for the inglorious peace of

Ludhiana: yet it never occurred to him that the time might well have been utilized in sending forward grain and forage collected from the country round, in taking precautions as to water and generally acquainting himself with the barren and difficult route ahead. For the army of the Indus was soon to learn, in painful, practical fashion, that it might "abound in envoys and major-generals and yet grievously suffer from lack of foresight."

Weeks, that might have been turned to good account, were wasted in useless impatience, and equally useless remonstrances to Burnes and his fellow secretaries in India. Finally—though by nature reluctant to assert his authority—Macnaghten's anxiety culminated in an emphatic letter to Sir Willoughby Cotton, criticizing his latest move and demanding an immediate supply of troops sufficient for carrying out "his lordship's plans" in Afghanistan. Thus, from the very outset, was struck the jarring note of antagonism between the military and political chiefs, which remained, throughout, one of the most disastrous features of the war.

But, before Macnaghten's demand could reach Sir Willoughby, word reached him from Hyderabad that he need come no farther, for all was well. The weak and vacillating princes of Sindh, startled at the hornets' nest they had brought about their ears, and uncertain as to the number of Anglo-Indian troops, had withdrawn their refusal and swallowed the new treaty whole, including even the detested tribute to Shah Shujah, whereof an astute minister had remarked, not without truth: "It is a joke talking of it as a demand from the king. . . . Any strength that he has, or may have, proceeds from you: so the demand is literally yours." It was acceded none the less, and with that concession was overthrown "the independence of rulers, our allies by treaty, whom we

professed to befriend . . . while sanctioning the obsolete demand for tribute . . . and unscrupulously subjugating their country on the plea that its occupation was essential for the defence of our frontier and the security of India."

Such is Sir Henry Durand's unvarnished statement of the case, whereto he adds the pungent comment: "If want of truth characterized the reasons . . . for invasion, . . . want of common acquaintance with the rudiments of war marked the course pursued in effecting it. The measure was as imbecile in conception as it was iniquitous in principle."

And with its conclusion the first act of the Afghan drama came peacefully, if not very creditably, to an end.

Without shadow of question the outstanding hero of that first act was Colonel Henry Pottinger, whose discretion and firm, yet forbearing, policy—unhurried by the misguided hastiness of his own Government, unperturbed by the recriminations of injured Amirs—prevented hostilities and saved the situation, though to "save the face" of his country was an achievement unhappily beyond his power.

And now at length the unwieldy army of the Indus turned its back upon Sindh: a veritable moving city, distressfully hampered by baggage camels and followers without number. For all Sir Henry Fane's insistence upon light equipment, human nature prevailed, and paid the price accordingly. Eleven years of peace conditions had wrought their demoralizing effect. Many young officers would as soon have marched without sword or pistols as without dressing-case, hair-wash and scented soap. Jams and pickles, plate and wax candles were all reckoned indispensable to the "efficiency of the corps." One regiment refused a proffered gift of cigars on the

score that their mess baggage already included two camel-loads of the best Manillas, and it is on record that a certain cavalry officer took with him forty servants: well that he should be nameless!

But servants, camels and followers—all were gone at last: and Henry Pottinger—sorely tried in health and temper by the event of the past five months—sat him down to write his mind to Government on the subject of Alexander Burnes, while at the same time tendering his resignation of a post he had held for little more than a year.

"I did not know," he wrote, "when accepting the appointment of Resident in Sindh that I should be colleagued with Sir Alexander Burnes; nor that he would be allowed to act as censor to his superior's dispatches, or avail himself of instructions peculiarly mine, to carry out his own plans; and that in opposition to the fact that those instructions were to be kept a profound secret till I chose to make them known. I may mention that I had already, while at Kutch, suffered a long series of indignities from the fact that the Bombay Government attached importance to Burnes's unfounded misrepresentations, which bid fair to ruin my public character, after thirty-three years of service, and kept me in constant anxiety and misery for two years. All has since been exposed and my character cleared. But had I known that my present appointment would connect me even slightly with Burnes I should have refused it. While Sir Alexander Burnes was on his Kabul mission he was under my orders as regards Sindh; yet the moment he crossed the Sindh frontier he wrote direct to Government impugning all my measures from first to last. The matter was easily explained; but the motive angered me, and I told him so in plain terms."

There followed much more in the same vein. After years of silent endurance the dam was down, the stream let loose, and the letter stands as a record of all that had secretly embittered Colonel Pottinger's political connection with Kutch and Sindh.

Finally came his resignation, couched in terms as plain as the rest. "By the time this letter reaches your lordship the affairs of Sindh will be more or less settled, and in consequence I beg to be relieved from a post in which heavy official drudgery has been rendered a hundredfold more irksome by the trouble I have had with Sir Alexander Burnes. I have disguised my feelings and kept silence for a long while, lest any open discord between us should cause public inconvenience; and my friends alone know what it has cost me to suppress, for so long, my annoyance and disgust."

With the signing and sealing of that letter the long strain was at an end. The mere writing of it had been a relief, and the prospect of escape from a hundred galling associations of relief no less; but it was a matter of months before his resignation could take affect. Not until the year was nearly ended did he set sail for England, where he enjoyed a well-earned rest, till trouble in China took him to the world's end, there to win fresh laurels for a name already famous throughout India.

X

It was on the 30th of January that Henry Pottinger wrote to Lord Auckland resigning his post in Sindh, and on that very day his nephew sat alone, as always, in the mud-walled box of a room that was his home, reviewing the past six weeks with as near an approach to satisfaction as he had felt since the day Herāt was delivered into his charge.

At last, it seemed, he had hit upon a scheme more or less workable, even though one party to its accomplishment were a Yar Mahomed Khan; and certain news of an approaching British army had wrought a wholesome effect on both brothers, twin authors of all discord and disaster. Since the caravan incident Pottinger had heard no more of slave traffic on a large scale, though he now knew his man too well to suppose that smaller secret transactions were not still carried on in his despite, even as an undercurrent of Persian intrigue persisted beneath the most convincing veneer of good behaviour. Plainly the best that could be achieved for the honour of the country, till strong support should arrive, was the suppression, at least, of all barefaced, open inhumanity and treason in a city known to be under British protection.

But although secret collusion with Persia was the more serious political offence, it was always the tyranny and slave traffic that aroused Pottinger's hottest indignation. "Oh, reform it altogether!" was the insistent cry of his heart, and there were few serious-minded men of his day who did not echo that cry with more or less fervour,

according to the spirit that was in them. For forty years and more the great crusade against negro slavery had gone from strength to strength. Wilberforce, Lachery, Macaulay and a host of lesser men had exerted themselves heroically, not without avail. But here in Central Asia it was indigenous to the soil. Arthur Conolly—zealot and visionary — had dreamed golden, impracticable dreams of wholesale freedom and conversion; while Eldred Pottinger, even at the risk of political friction, waged obstinate war against the accursed traffic, demanding, with the divine impatience of youth, immediate abolition of a habit ingrained in the race and sanctioned by Mahomed himself.

Denunciations and promises having failed, he was now trying the more persuasive method of reward. "Yar Mahomed Khan and his adherents," he wrote to Sir John McNeill at this time, "had begun to sell the wretched inhabitants in droves, notwithstanding my remonstrances; and on procuring coin, I, for the sake of these unfortunate beings, consented to pay the amount of his and his men's allowances, conditionally on their stopping this horrible traffic and giving up all control of the taxes; in which situation I am awaiting instructions and aid."

Thus, for the moment, he had bought comparative peace for himself and the people; armed neutrality, rather; for always a hidden undercurrent of antagonism kept his senses alert, his nerves at strain. Even among his own escort and servants there was none to whom he dared trust save his old comrade, the brave but thick-headed soldier, Allah Dad Khan. For the rest, he knew himself surrounded by spies eager to twist his simplest words and acts into proof of secret machinations against the Herāt Government. Unable themselves to enjoy life without the stimulant of feud and intrigue, they could

not credit the existence of a Government agent who failed to make good his obvious facilities in that direction.

Of late, renewed Persian intercourse had somewhat disturbed his more friendly relations with the Wazir, and in consequence Yar Mahomed's followers had been allowed, without check or punishment, to gratify their barbarous taste for amusement at the expense of those whom Pottinger made it peculiarly his business to protect. And now, at the month's end, when the promised allowances fell due, he asked himself, was he justified in keeping his share of the bargain for the sake of peace, when these incorrigible Afghans failed to keep theirs?

Refusal would certainly involve him in renewed friction, of which his soul was unspeakably weary. It would be so much simpler to ignore awkward details and pay the price of peace. Nerves and temper had been a good deal tried during the past week, and his health already showed signs of resenting the long strain put upon it; the ill-cooked, greasy food, and the insanitary conditions of Herāt at its best.

"Better pay the men and let be," urged inclination.

"Is that true peace which is bought at the cost of self-respect?" queried Conscience; and, as if in reply, came sounds of arrival, footsteps, voices. Evidently a visitor of rank; for there were followers also.

Then the door opened, and Taj Mahomed—a man of his escort—announced, "Sirdar Shere Mahomed Khan."

Visits from the Sirdar were infrequent, and Pottinger had a premonition of trouble even while he returned, in due form, the fulsome greeting: "May you be in the sanctuary of the Creator, preserved from all accident and mischance of the world."

"I am honoured by your foot upon my threshold, Sirdar Sahib," said he, not without a tinge of irony; and

saluting the attendant Khans, bade them be seated upon rugs laid out for that purpose; Shere Mahomed and himself occupying the only chairs.

"I am come on account of my brother, Pottinger Sahib," the Afghan announced bluntly, without the decorative preamble dear to his race. "He sends word by way of reminder that, the month being ended, he desires you should muster his men to-morrow and pay them according to promise made."

Even had Pottinger's conscience been of the docile order, tone and request combined would have turned the scale against peace.

"Have I shown myself so forgetful that I should need the reminder?" he asked, a note of challenge in his voice. "And has the Wazir so faithfully kept his word that he can without confusion of face demand the fulfilment of mine? Promise of payment was made upon condition, as you know; and you know also, even as he does, whether or no it is justly due."

At that Shere Khan—who was evidently in an evil mood—flung restraint and common courtesy to the winds.

"You refuse payment? *Bismillah!* This comes of putting faith in Feringhi liars!" he shouted, squaring his shoulders pugnaciously as if to overawe the shorter, sturdier Englishman. And before Pottinger could rectify his misconception he launched into a torrent of expostulation adorned with choice flowers of Afghan abuse. "Much advantage to *us* that we refrain from extortion that is our right," he concluded furiously, "if we are to be cheated of compensation because certain low-born men have suffered at the hands of the soldier-*log*. They be not babes, these men, that we can keep them in swaddling clothes. When the desire is upon them they are as fed horses in the dawn, careless of bit or bridle; and how

should this *dog* attempt to curb them with a silken thread——!"

The abusive epithet, fairly hurled in Pottinger's face, set his hot blood tingling, and he spoke with sudden imperious heat.

"That is enough, Sirdar Sahib. I request that you leave my house at once."

But the Afghan's blood was up also. "I go at no man's bidding till my business be done," he retorted, his black eyes flashing defiance. "*Wah-illah!* You arrogant English deem yourselves kings of all the world!"

"Sirdar Sahib, I have said that is enough," Pottinger repeated, dismissing further talk with a peremptory gesture. "As for the Wazir's business—I have not yet refused payment. But I will settle the matter with Yar Mahomed in person; not with one who has insulted both myself and my Government. It is enough. Go at once, or by Allah, my men shall turn you out."

The big Afghan stared insolently. "Turn me out! A likely tale!"

"Taj Mahomed! Allah Dad!" shouted Pottinger, and, prompt as thought, two Herātis of his escort stood in the doorway: not Allah Dad, who had gone on an errand to the bazaar.

"The Sirdar Sahib hath insulted me and refused to leave my house. Put him out!"

But for all the anger in his eyes and command in his tone, the men's hesitation was evident. They would cheerfully have died for the Englishman in open fight; but fear of the Afghan ran in their blood.

Shere Mahomed's triumph was complete. He laughed aloud. "*Inshallah!* Said I not so? There is no man in this house, Pottinger Sahib, who *dares* put me to the door."

It was a challenge, direct, unmistakable—and Pot-

tinger's Irish temper flared up in response. Without further waste of words, he gripped the Afghan by the shoulders and forced him to his feet. Shere Mahomed, nothing dismayed, would have resisted even to violence had not the startled onlookers risen up and forced the two men apart.

"Of what use to make further trouble, my friend?" urged a placable old Khan, securing the Sirdar's arm and unobtrusively propelling him towards the door. "Pottinger Sahib hath right of command in his own house."

"'Tis a right I am not like to dispute with him again!" Shere Mahomed answered sullenly, and permitted himself to be withdrawn into the street.

Left alone, Eldred Pottinger sat down beside his table and leaned his head upon his hand, wondering, between anxiety and exasperation, what would happen next. Quite possibly an Afghan's insolence and his own hot temper had cancelled, in ten minutes, the work of weeks. If recrimination followed in place of apology, he might even be obliged to leave the city; to reap the odium and mortification of Government reproof as the net result of his great adventure. Bitterly he regretted his momentary loss of self-control; while yet he was fain to admit that, in the circumstances, few Englishmen and no Irishman would have acted otherwise.

Hark! What was that? He sat upright and listened in a tense stillness.

Distant shouts drew rapidly nearer; nor was he long left in doubt as to their meaning. Recrimination it was to be—and of the swiftest. Without a word of inquiry, the Wazir had presumably turned the soldiers loose to revenge themselves according to their own will and pleasure.

Pottinger sprang up and shouted for his men. They appeared forthwith, the two faint-hearted ones in obvious distress.

"Oh, Sahib—Sahib, consider now if it was well even for your Honour to lay hands on the Sirdar," Tāj Mahomed ventured, palm set to palm. "The soldier-*log* are in the streets stirring up the people. Listen! Even now they are entering your Honour's courtyard, doubtless to plunder our houses and dishonour our women."

"Enough of chatter!" Pottinger broke in sharply. "Why is the courtyard left empty? Where are the rest of my people?"

"Save for ourselves and two others, all are gone to the market-place or bazaar. *Hazúr*, what now remains to be done?"

"Nothing—but to bar the doors and await the issue. I have many well-wishers among the people and the merchants. It will be seen."

Pottinger spoke quietly, yet not without a shade of bitterness. To be condemned to inaction was the crowning misery of an anxious situation. But resistance were worse than folly. He could only rely upon the good-will of his friends and of the people as a whole.

Suddenly the door of his inner room was flung open, and he swung round to discover that the supposed intruder was Allah Dad Khan, still breathless from his flight through the streets.

"Praise God your Honour is safe!" he panted. "All who were with me have been seized by the men of the Wazir. I, only, fled in secret through a friend's house, while they quarrelled amongst themselves." Suddenly prostrating himself, he saluted his master's foot. "*Hazúr*—what is this evil that hath fallen, swift and sudden as a stone out of the sky?"

A loud, hurried knocking at the main door interrupted him; and a babel of sound without announced that the courtyard was in possession of the enemy.

"Who is it that knocks?" cried Pottinger.

"Syud Mahomed Alayar and three friends," came the welcome answer. Then Pottinger himself unbarred the door, and let in four Syuds from the valley of Pishin; holy men, not to be rashly set at naught even by the lawless soldiery of Yar Mahomed Khan.

Fervent embraces ensued, fervent protestations of a devotion already proved in deed as in word. Pottinger briefly accounted for the sudden upheaval, and Syud Mahomed, a venerable elder, nodded approbation.

"You did well indeed, my friend. We heard merely that there had been high words between yourself and the Sirdar; and rising up, straightway we came to your house, here to remain till this madness be past. If there be any service we may render, in proof of friendship and esteem, speak only. It is done. We will all be put to the sword before any man shall lay hands upon your honourable self, whom Allah augment to the seat of magnificence and power."

"Syud Sahib, I believe you and thank you from my heart," Pottinger answered simply. Personal risk, as such, concerned him little, if at all. But the sincere attachment of these good men moved him to the depths, and adequate speech was difficult. "Should matters indeed become serious, it will not be the first time I have owed my safety to a Syud of Pishin! What think you? Is it an outbreak of the soldiers only, or will they encourage a tumult among the people?"

"That never!" the Syud declared stoutly. "Yar Mahomed hath enough of shrewdness to know it were beyond even *his* power to achieve. Heard you not of

his answer to the Persian emissary only last week? 'How can we turn this man out,' said he, 'when he is giving us all things, even feeding our beggars; and has made every person in Herāt his own?'"

Pottinger smiled. "A cunning answer, worthy of him who made it. Yet I am well aware that if ever Irān sent more than promises, no such scruple would restrain him for a moment. And now—since there is nothing to be done, let us at least refresh ourselves and wait upon events."

Bowls of tea, with *chupatties* and curds, were duly set before each guest; while the talk turned mainly upon that one supreme topic, the upward march of the British army, which it was believed would have a profound effect, not merely on the fate of Afghanistan, but upon the whole of Central Asia.

The tumult, without, waxed and waned fitfully till near sunset. Then, of a sudden, the voice of Shere Mahomed was heard issuing peremptory orders; and before Pottinger had time to guess what this might bode, there fell a renewed knocking on the outer door.

To his call "Who is it?" came the reply: "A messenger bringing explanation and apology from the Wazir."

The voice was the voice of Shere Mahomed, and Pottinger smiled at so speedy a return to the scene of his discomfiture. As for the explanation and apology, he already knew too well the fashion and the value of both. But when he would have risen, Syud Mahomed put forth a detaining hand.

"Not yet shall he be let in, my friend. I myself will go out to hear his message and speak my mind upon the matter. Then I will return, bringing you word."

The word he brought, after a heated parley in the

courtyard, was couched in terms that began to grow wearisome with repetition. Yar Mahomed, it seemed, was in no way responsible for the misbehaviour of his men, who, being assembled, and hearing a rumour that payment would be denied them, had rushed forth without orders to plunder the Feringhi's house. Only within the hour had the disgraceful affair come to their master's knowledge; and straightway he had despatched his brother to drive off the marauders, apologize for the disturbances, and leave word that reparation should be made.

"As for Shere Mahomed," the Syud concluded, a gleam of scorn in his eyes, "when I reproached him for using so disgraceful an epithet to your honourable self, he exclaimed in surprise that I must surely have misunderstood your account of the matter; or you, in a moment of heat, must have misconstrued his meaning. He now swears, by all the names of God, that the expression was applied to *himself;* and the Khans who came with him assert that it seemed so to them at the time. What would you have?"

He turned out both hands, and the scorn in his eyes was reflected in the blue ones opposite.

"If I misjudged him, I am sorry and will apologize," Pottinger answered, not without amusement at the politic change of front. "But the Sirdar spoke in anger; and knowing him for a man little given to self-deprecation, I may possibly be excused for my lack of understanding. The disturbance is over, then? He has dismissed the Wazir's men?"

"So he said."

It soon transpired that he had merely dismissed his brother's soldiery, to replace them by a strong guard of his own; and, except that none dare hinder the Syuds

from passing out and in, Pottinger would have found himself in polite confinement, effectually cut off from intercourse with the city. But, in the East, saintliness is a more practical asset than anywhere else on earth; so the holy men from Pishin went and came again unchallenged, bringing their mats for sleeping and all necessaries for the evening meal.

Save for this significant fact of detention the outburst of ill feeling appeared to have calmed down; and when, after dark the voice of a relation was heard calling Tāj Mahomed to the door, the man—without hesitation—opened it and looked forth.

Instantly his arm was gripped as in a vice, the hand that clung to the lintel cut off at a blow, and he was dragged screaming out into the night.

At his first yell of terror Pottinger leapt forward with blazing eyes, followed by two of his escort eager for instant retaliation. But as the door slammed to he checked himself with a muttered oath, and the Syud, rising also, laid a persuasive hand upon his arm.

"My friend, to attempt a rescue is to set foot in an open trap and play the game of Shere Mahomed Khan."

Pottinger nodded reluctant assent. "It would lead to actual fighting, of course. And they might make that the signal for a general massacre?"

"Without doubt such is the thought of their hearts."

The Englishman let out his breath in a sigh of exasperation, and restrained his excited men with a gesture of command.

"The Syud Sahib speaks wisdom. There is nothing to gain by impatience. Let all the doors be secured, and we will abide the issue of the morrow."

XI

Morning brought his old friend Mirza Ibrahim, steeped to the lips in apology and abasement, wherein Yar Mahomed excelled—by proxy.

The seizure and mutilation of Tāj Mahomed lent a more serious aspect to the affair; and if the man were not honestly ashamed he was at least honestly fearful of the possible results. But Pottinger was in no mood for the sounding brass and tinkling cymbals of Oriental apology. He sent back word that he required first to know the meaning of such barbarous and inhospitable conduct.

"If, in any respect, I have done wrong," said he, "surely it was due to my services, if not to my Government, and some inquiry should have been made, and an apology demanded, with the alternative of formal dismissal and a complaint to the British Government. As for the Sirdar, I am ready to accept the word of his followers that the abusive epithet which angered me referred only to himself; and I will send him a dress of honour in acknowledgment of my mistake. Also, having promised to pay your men, I will keep my word regardless of their deserts. In return I ask only for leave to depart from your city before worse befall me."

But, as usual, this was the last request Yar Mahomed was minded to grant. Apology, promises, reparation—these cost little and could always be had for the asking. Shere Mahomed came yet again to proffer them and to entreat that Pottinger, in token of forgiveness, would meet his old friend and ally at the Sirdar's house that

same evening. All this denoted a wholesome fear of British retribution; and Pottinger, mindful of injunctions to keep the peace at any price, decided to accept explanation and invitation for what they were worth.

The meeting passed off without friction. Yar Mahomed's alarm was, for once, so genuine that Pottinger was the more inclined to leniency. Personally he would forgive all that had passed. He would ask Government to overlook the insult and the uncalled-for mutilation of his servant. But—if only for the sake of his country's prestige—he demanded that the Shah send an apology to Calcutta, promising never again to lay hands on the servant of a British subject; that Tāj Mahomed be presented with a dress of honour and a grant of land in addition to money given by himself; that all plundered properties be restored and the plunderers punished. Finally he decreed that the Wazir, with all the Herāt chiefs, should assemble at his house to make a formal profession of regret. Thence they should escort him to the city, and publicly install him at the Pae-i-Takht; that the people who had seen him set at naught might also see him re-established by those responsible for the tumult.

It was an elaborate programme; but by this time Pottinger knew his noble allies well enough to perceive, and boldly apply, the sole means of holding their Afghanism in check. If this, the first attempt at open violence, were not dealt with publicly and decisively, his position would soon become impossible; and, despite his intercession, he looked that his own Government should support him at least by a formal censure of Yar Mahomed's entire conduct since the siege was raised.

For the present, thanks to his own promptitude and decision, backed by the support of the Syuds, his victory was complete; his personal prestige undamaged by a bolt from the blue that, irresolutely met, might have ruined

all. But an outbreak so uncalled-for increased Pottinger's conviction that, without military support of some kind, the foothold of Britain in Herāt would never be made secure. From every side came rumours of ferment and unrest. Mahomed Shah renewed his preparations for return; and the eyes of all looked southward—some in apprehension, some in expectation—for the coming of that formidable army which alone had power to restore law and order in the land.

Much of this Pottinger set forth in a letter to Macnaghten, together with a straightforward account of the late disturbance; neither glossing over nor excusing his own outburst of temper, which had unquestionably brought matters to a climax. He strongly advocated pushing on a brigade from Kandahar so soon as that city had been occupied or even invested: adding, in conclusion: "I hope you will not consider my offering advice officious. I feel encouraged to do so by being on the spot and seeing the eyes of every person turned on us: I mean with regard to the advance of our troops. I have not had any letters from India since the 12th of January, and no intelligence at all from Sir John McNeill. Kohundil Khan still persists in keeping the Kandahar road blockaded, and for fifteen days not a soul has arrived from that place. If grain does not soon come in, the state of this place will be dreadful; and I, for want of confidential aid, can do nothing."

Before this letter could be despatched, a heavy snowfall throughout the country conspired with unfriendly chiefs to make the lonely Englishman's isolation still more complete. But although he could do nothing without the walls, and no word of human fellowship could reach him, there remained, as always, much to be done and much to contend against within. The restoration of armed neutrality implied no respite from the system

of secret espionage which incessantly kept his nerves at strain and hampered his every act and word; so that he dared scarcely engage a servant, lest he should be taking into his household some creature of the Wazir, paid to spy upon his talk and correspondence. Even when all seemed quietest he knew himself to be living on the edge of a crater by no means extinct: nor could he ever guess from morning to morning what new exigencies or unexpected demands the day might bring forth. With little knowledge, even now, of Government's intentions, with no political experience, and none to lighten the twofold burden of work and responsibility, he must somehow contrive to keep up friendly negotiations with Afghan chiefs, increasingly suspicious of British designs upon their country; must furnish his own Government with reports as long and detailed as distracting conditions would permit; feed the starving; contend with threatened return of famine; thoroughly sift all rumours or information brought in by passing *Kafilas*, and dispense rough justice in person at the Pae-i-Takht. Tedious and distracting duties, these last, for a conscientious man; the more so, that he was constantly called upon to inquire into allegations and remonstrances against those very authorities with whom peace at any price was, in effect, the one clear command laid upon him by Government.

Among his manifold responsibilities was none more complex, more harassing, than that of handling Government money and securing it against theft. Impossible to keep much under his own roof, without the fact—even to the precise amount—becoming known; which in a city chronically disordered were sheer incentive to aggression. Equally impossible to establish a straightforward account with a Hindoo *soukar*.[1] The man would

[1] Banker.

promptly have been terrorized by Yar Mahomed into supplying detailed information of Pottinger's money transactions: and very early in the day he had realized the importance of keeping the Herāt authorities as ignorant as might be of the means and resources at his command. To this end he kept hidden in his quarters only enough gold to meet any sudden demand. Any other sums he might possess were scattered among various *soukars*, so that even they might be kept uncertain of the total amount.

Even thus, Yar Mahomed could not resist periodic attempts at solving a problem that touched him more nearly than any other. Already, in October, he had sent for the principal Hindu *soukars* and, by methods of persuasion peculiarly his own, had tried to discover the exact amount disbursed: without his wonted success. Now again, in February, he unearthed a convenient pretext for having these men arrested, their offices occupied, and their accounts strictly examined. But between their loyalty to Pottinger and his own skilful complications, they were neither willing nor able to supply exact figures; and Yar Mahomed was outwitted at every turn.

The Persian Munshis were a more fearful folk; and Pottinger knew well that, under stress of terror, they would render account of his words and acts, and of his letters also, unless the utmost secrecy were observed in their writing and dispatch. Only with his good friends the Syuds of Pishin he dealt openly in his own person, alike from gratitude and good policy. For the sanctity of these men and the universal respect they commanded made their support a practical necessity, if he were to hold the position he had won for himself at Herāt.

This undercurrent of enmity, involving ceaseless vigilance and the meeting of guile with guile, defeated all attempts at regular office work or the keeping of clear,

detailed accounts, which must yet by some means be supplied. The fact that he could not even employ a regular Munshi made the mere amount of writing a formidable burden. As regards money, it was impossible at the time to do more than keep a secret record of actual bills drawn, month by month, to defray the price of friendship with Yar Mahomed Khan—at his own figure. That the figure in question would prove a high one was daily made more evident by the continuous outflow of ducats and drafts on the Indian Government, without which it seemed impossible to avoid friction or keep the wheels of state in working order.

The abiding problem, this, of all political pioneering in Asia, more especially where friendship is known to be an important item in the programme: and almost invariably the agent first in the field has been censured for undue lavishness. Yet it should be remembered that almost as invariably the choice has lain between such censure and the dread word "failure," with the lasting slur it leaves upon a man, no matter how impeccable his motives, nor how hard the iron pressure of circumstance. Put it how we may, the propitiation of chiefs beyond the Indian border is, frankly, a matter of bribery; though subsidy has the more becoming sound. Kashmir, Burmah, and the petty chiefs of the Hindu Khush, are, or were, "priced," so to speak, according to their varying degrees of importance. The very Pathans along the North-West Frontier have only been kept quiet, of late years, by a judicious prescription of "tribal allowances" tinctured with fines: while the present Amir of Afghanistan receives, in exchange for a somewhat unstable friendship, the lordly allowance of £120,000 a year.

Now in 1839—though the value of Herāt may have been overestimated—the Wazir was, without question, the most able and powerful figure in Central Asia; not

even excepting Dōst Mahomed Khan: and British anxiety for his good-will being sufficiently obvious, he was not the man to sell his treasure for a song. That the bargain might have been more cheaply attained by a political of wider experience and higher official standing is an assertion easier to make than to prove. Lacking both, Pottinger could but do his utmost; whereby he, at least, achieved conciliation, and gave Herāt itself a new lease of life. And if the cost seemed excessive—as indeed it was—after-events gave ample proof that the fault lay with the policy rather than with the man.

But the end was not yet: and in the meanwhile, enough for the day was the demand thereof. As though these did not sufficiently absorb his time and energies, he devoted his evenings to rendering the New Testament into Pushtoo, a task that came as pure rest and refreshment after the harassing duties and interruptions of the day.

February brought the first ill news of Stoddart's imprisonment: and Pottinger—knowing that it might go hard with his imperious-tempered friend—promptly dispatched public servants, with letters to the Wazir of Bokhara, inquiring after Stoddart's health and welfare in the name of the British Government. At the same time he privately entrusted two reliable men of his own with a packet of personal letters, and laid urgent commands upon them to help "the Sahib" in every possible way. Lastly, knowing that, in such a predicament, lack of money might be a life and death matter, he sent advices to Indians in Bokhara, bidding them honour Stoddart's drafts upon himself up to the amount of two thousand ducats. It was the utmost he could do in the way of friendship: and praying that it might serve, he lulled his own secret fears with the anodyne of work.

XII

As the month drew to an end he began to look eagerly for Lord Auckland's remonstrance on the graceless treatment of his representatives in October: remonstrance that Pottinger counted on to strengthen his own hand and curb the increasing arrogance of Yar Mahomed Khan. This last was rendered the more imperative by rumours of a secret coalition between Persia, Herāt and the local chiefs to oppose Shah Shujah's return to the throne. Feasible or no, it served to show which way the wind blew, and to increase Pottinger's anxiety for that decisive Government support which Macnaghten's letter must surely contain.

He was not kept waiting over-long. On the 13th of March it came.

Eagerly, almost hopefully, Pottinger broke the great red seal. But before his eyes had scanned the first few paragraphs hope gave place to incredulous surprise, and that in turn to bitter mortification as conviction grew upon him that, beneath the courteous formalities of officialdom, lay a definite note of disapproval almost amounting to blame; regardless of the fact that the principals in the quarrel had been Colonel Stoddart and Yar Mahomed Khan. In addition he found conciliatory enclosures to the address of Shah Kamrān and his Wazir; and it needed but this to make his sense of humiliation complete.

Impossible for the man of theory sitting at ease in his office chair, a thousand miles away, to realize the effect

of his own passing annoyance on the man of action, who has striven and endured, month after month, in the certain hope that his efforts will be recognized, his position upheld. To Eldred Pottinger, who had fronted danger, sickness, privation undismayed, this last unkindest cut seemed harder to bear than all that had gone before.

The actual text of that disheartening letter has not survived, but the gist of it may be inferred from Pottinger's reply, written two days later, when the ferment of brain and heart had sufficiently cooled down to admit of some attempt at self-justification. Futile it might be —and most often is; but it was not in human nature to keep silence under a dual infliction that he could not but regard as at once impolitic and undeserved.

Far on into the night he wrote, and re-wrote, till he had achieved the rough copy as it still stands in the slim native book containing his official letters of that year. Then the fair copy was begun—

> "My dear Sir,
>
> "I had the pleasure to receive your letter of the 2nd of February, the night before last."—The ironic formality raised the ghost of a smile.—"But it was with the greatest pain and mortification I gathered from it that his Lordship the Governor-General, and yourself, disapproved of my conduct and considered it indiscreet and untimely. With respect to the remarks you have made on my interference with the internal affairs of this place (and from which, as you rightly conjecture, all the difficulties arose) it was by the express desire, solicitation and even entreaty of the authorities themselves. The people, perfectly ruined by the calamities of the siege, tyrannized over by lawless followers and fear-

ing a famine, were preparing for flight. The authorities were well aware of their unpopularity and unfaithfulness, and knew they had no chance of preventing complete desertion of the country but by procuring us to guarantee justice and good faith.

"I was also aware of this state of things, and agreed to guarantee their promises. The good effect of this was immediately seen; but the authorities from want (as they alleged) were not able to keep them; nor I to meet their demands for money. I had no idea of the intention of Government regarding this country; and the conduct, demands and expectations of its rulers left me no hope that we could ever live quietly in alliance with or support of them. So, in the absence of instructions, I had to keep to general promises, of the British Government supporting them as long as they acted in conformity with justice and our wishes. I particularly stood on the point of slavery, as it gave at any time a sufficient cause to break with them; while it is universally execrated by all people except those attached to the present ruler. . . .

"My interference was strictly confined to urging the authorities to keep their promises, and from the engagements I had guaranteed I had no course left but that which placed me in opposition to the authorities and led to the estrangement.

"With respect to the people it is universally wished that we should occupy these countries for ourselves, and believed that we will do so. All my language to the contrary is of no use. As to the alarm it would create, the advance of our army is believed by every one to be for our own sakes, and that Shah Shujah is merely used as a name to cover

our aggression. You will now be received with as great, and I think greater, opposition than if you had not brought the Shah. . . .

"I observe by your letter to Yar Mahomed Khan that you have requested him to send a trustworthy person to meet and treat with you at Kandahar. I have frequently urged him to send an envoy to India, to acknowledge his obligation to the Government, and he has put it off till now; but on receiving your letter he has made up his mind to send the Topshy Bāshy, Naju Khan, who is his firmest adherent and, indeed, the only man of sense about him, though he is shrewd, avaricious and fond of the bottle.

"If any of my acts here appear indiscreet or unconciliatory I beg to point out that I was, on account of the guarantee given, obliged to make as public as possible my disapproval and disallowance of Yar Mahomed's acts, for the sake of preserving our reputation for good faith. Being at such a distance from instructions, if I had waited till Government expressed its displeasure at the Herāti's breach of faith, our character would have been sullied for integrity and uprightness; which, at this time, I consider of far greater importance than conciliating two or three unpopular chiefs. And I flatter myself you will find, on inquiry, that I have left no means untried to preserve the good wishes of the Afghans in general. Grain and a small moveable force are absolutely necessary here. I beg, however, that you will not arrange anything regarding this place at Kandahar; but, if possible, visit this yourself. For I think that unless you do so my conduct may be liable to misconception; as it is impossible to describe the state of the country or the conduct of its rulers.

"Unexperienced as I am in affairs of Government, I trust that, for my guidance in future, I may have the benefit of your personal instructions; that in judging my past conduct you will favour me by reviewing it on the spot; bearing in mind that I was totally without instructions, or even information as to the intentions of Government, while the people with whom I was situated were strangers to probity and humanity.

"The Persians still occupy Ghoriān, and as long as it remains in their hands the people here remain insecure and doubtful. They are still prosecuting their intrigues . . . and if we do not aid them they will and must throw themselves on some Government that will."

And so an end; as far as any incident of human life can ever be said to end. For Pottinger there remained nothing but to lull disappointment and pain by renewed endeavour, though his confidence was shaken and his sanguine spirit clouded as never yet.

Happily the same *Kāsid* had brought personal letters to cheer him and distract his thoughts. They were the first that had come to hand since the middle of January, and to them he reverted thankfully so soon as the unpalatable "official" could be dismissed from his mind.

Goodly budgets of news from his Uncles Henry and William—a Major stationed at Bombay—and a close-written, characteristic effusion from his brother Tom, a lad of lively intelligence, no little promise and a very sustaining belief in himself to boot. Judging from occasional letters, both he and John were like to become soldiers of undoubted energy and ability; cleverer, in many respects, and endowed with a keener eye for

practical advantages than their distinguished brother. His golden strain of idealism gave them, no doubt, a vague, pleasant sense of superiority in worldly wisdom, dearly though they loved him, and keenly as they relished his sudden leap into fame. Tom wrote from Delhi, where he was stationed with his regiment, the 54th Native Infantry; and his artless, eminently practical suggestions for prompt self-advertisement must have set the older man smiling for all his heaviness of spirit.

"My dear Eldred," it ran,

"I have intended writing to you for some time, but your movements have been so variously reported by the newspapers that I send this as a sort of random shot. . . .

"John mentions that my father entertains some wild scheme of coming to Bombay as agent for the Asphalt Association, which is some damned Speculation for covering roads with Asphalt, etc. . . . They pretend to offer my father £600 a year; but on his having gone to the expense and trouble of the voyage to India, I suspect he will find that the bubble has burst, and he allowed to return at his own leisure and expense! His inducement for doing so is that he had given up the rents of the Kilmore estate for three years for the purpose of purchasing it out, which will be a great advantage to you, as the property in some years will be, I believe, very valuable.

"In the meantime my father has little or nothing to live on, and has been trying without success to get some Government appointment. But as this is a Speculation I really believe he would rather have it than a certainty. It is a most extraordinary thing that a man of such splendid talents and excellent

sense should be so easily gulled by every fool or knave he comes across; and although never successful in any undertaking (and I have known a dozen at least) he is as sanguine of this succeeding as if he had never miscarried in any. I intend writing to him, strongly advising him to have nothing to say to any Speculation; but he is so well aware that I hate the name of one even, that I am afraid that he will not pay much attention to me, for which reason I wish you would also write to the same effect.

"I am delighted to hear of your success at Herāt, and trust that you will be able to restore our family to its proper station. Save all cash you can and get back, if possible, the 'dirty acres'; as in these days family honour, or anything else, is a mere name without money; and at home, were you another Sir Isaak Newton or a Napoleon, without cash, you would be looked on as inferior to a grocer with money. So save what you can and buy back the estates. Above all do not be fool enough to marry!

"Another thing you ought to do immediately is to write an account of the siege of Herāt, etc., etc., interlarded with something of the views of the Russians, North American Indians, etc., etc.,—or *anything* upon British India. It will be sure to take; and you may depend there is no getting on without appearing in print. Look at that humbug, Sir A. Burnes, for instance; a fellow who by all accounts is much fitter for a Grub Street author than anything else. What has he done, even as a traveller, compared to you? And yet if you do not *publish*, you may wait a thousand years and you will not be rewarded like him. The great thing is to bring yourself into notice at Home. This has always been the

mistake of our family: we've always been contented with our own actions without making every one else acquainted with them, and what has been the consequence.

"Let me advise you seriously to write—if it be only a pamphlet—and publish it in London, after advertising it in every paper in Great Britain and Ireland! You will then become celebrated, and that is all a man requires to get on. Depend upon it, it will be time and money well spent. But do it *immediately*, as the Indian and Russian fever seems strong at home at present; but in the course of six months some person who stands on his head, or speaks the unknown tongues, or animal magnetism, or some other nonsense will be the rage. . . .

"I wrote to Mr. Macnaghten, to whom I brought out letters, asking him to obtain leave for me to join the Army of the Indus; and the other day received an answer, saying that until I had served my two years it would be impossible to do so; but that then the Government, on my uncle's and on your account, would be most favourably disposed towards me and that he would assist me in any way in his power. What a pity I did not enter the service five years sooner. This is a tolerably long letter considering the chances there are against its ever reaching you. Write soon, and believe me,

"Your affectionate brother,

"THOMAS POTTINGER."

Needless to add that the sagacious advice, tendered in all seriousness, was reprehensibly ignored. A geographical record of his journey he fully hoped to achieve; but that descriptive pamphlet of the siege was never

written, nor even thought upon by the hero of the defence. True heroism is sublimely unaware of itself. It remained for Major Todd to enlighten Government, and Sir John Kay to enlighten England, as to the full extent of Eldred Pottinger's gallantry and zeal. But if he ignored his brother's advice, he did not fail to bear in mind his desire for active service: a desire tragically fulfilled.

The letter of congratulation from Major William Pottinger in Bombay was in much the same cheerful vein as that of his nephew from Delhi, and expressed, though less urgently, the same hope of future publication.

"It would be useless for me to add my mite to what has been so forcibly expressed by the Governor-General; but I trust . . . we shall one day have a full account of all your travels and operations, from your first setting out from Bhooj up to the day on which the Persians raised the siege of *your city!*"

For the rest, personalities, local gossip, giving a glimpse of social Bombay in '39—the ride at dusk, the palanquin at noon, the jealousies and criticisms engendered by the last list of C.B.'s; the "gentle and amiable" young ladies of the station, on whom Major Pottinger dilated for the benefit of his banished nephew.

"The chief beauties here are Miss Voyle, a great pet of Mrs. Pottinger's, and a Miss Hewitt, whom Ensign Montague saved from destruction last Evening when her Horse ran away with her. They are both little angels; I wish you had either of them (lawfully, of course) to solace you at Herāt."

And did Eldred Pottinger, in his loneliness, echo that wish? Did it, by chance, stir a sleeping memory, or lure him, even for an hour, from the harassment of Afghan politics, to vague, unformed visions of a future shared

with the one woman who should fill out and complete him by possessing all the gracious elements he conspicuously lacked: the one woman for whom, it may safely be said, he would have been better able to lay down his life than bring himself to tell her so.

Had there ever been, would there ever be, for him that divine folly, whose price is above rubies? The speculation is irresistible as it is unanswerable. No trace of it in letters or journals. Little revelation, anywhere, of his attitude towards this supremely human element in life, beyond the native chivalry of the masculine man and a deep affection for children, that found some outlet in his care for all who were left fatherless after the siege. His sedulous aloofness from the few women, with whom he was thrown into close contact after the Afghan War, may have been less a matter of temperament than of habit, engendered by long absence from their sphere of influence.

Be that as it may, if his imagination were not over active, passion was strong in him, and his heart infinitely tender; so that on occasion he may well have seen visions and dreamed dreams, as lonely men are more apt to do than they may care to admit: and from such dreams, how rude the awakening to a reality of labour unshared, of ineffectual striving against conditions of life too hideous to be depicted in words.

And now to the persistent, veiled antagonism of Afghan tyranny was added the disheartening conviction that his own Government could neither appreciate his difficulties, nor realize the futility of hoping to remove the more rank abuses by gaining "the confidence and co-operation" of a Yar Mahomed Khan.

XIII

"ALLAH DAD!"

"*Hazúr.*"

"Bring pen and paper, and another cushion for my shoulders. I must write."

"*Nahin, Hazúr.* Have patience yet a little. Your honour hath not strength to hold the pen."

With a gesture of entreaty the faithful soldier kneeled beside the sleeping-mat whereon for near two weeks his master had lain, rolled in a cotton quilt, burning and shivering by turns; talking strange talk, and refusing all nourishment but tea and milk strongly tinctured with quinine. Persistently administered, these had wrought their miracle of healing: and in spite of a body that seemed curiously unrelated to himself, Pottinger's brain was clear.

Another letter from Macnaghten, dated February 22, demanded acknowledgment, and by a determined effort of will no doubt the thing could be done; though the thoughts floated loose in his brain, like torn and scattered leaves of a book that he was too weary to collect and put together again. The need for insistence vaguely angered him, and he frowned.

"Since when hast thou presumed to disobey my orders, Allah Dad? Bring what I need; also the packet on my table—or I fetch them myself."

The voice was weak and husky; but the note of command was there; and at the grotesque threat the Afghan smiled ruefully, wagging his beard.

The implements were brought, and Pottinger, extracting Macnaghten's letter, succeeded in refreshing his blurred recollection of its contents. The secretary's annoyance—bred of anxiety lest any accident befall his cherished scheme—had blown over: and he could not be expected to realize its disheartening effect upon a man tired out, in brain and body, by eighteen months of such severe strain on both, as Macnaghten himself, in all his twenty-five years of desk work, had never known. He now wrote with his wonted complacence. He had little doubt that all his assistant's primary arrangements were judicious. In regard to payments made and contemplated, he placed great reliance on Pottinger's discretion, while assuring him that the Governor-General would "gladly sanction the expenditure of any sum necessary to the security of his position, the frustration of hostile intrigues, and the maintenance of friendship with the authorities of Herāt."

Yet it was Pottinger who was afterwards criticized for having accustomed the Herāt authorities to do nothing, however clearly to their advantage, without being exorbitantly paid for the exertion; whereas the facts of the case go to prove that, first and last, money was the undisguised object of Yar Mahomed Khan, and that Pottinger protested more than once against the indignity of bargaining for justice and good conduct—without avail.

But for the moment friction was in abeyance; and Macnaghten in a gracious mood. "On this side," he concluded cheerfully, "everything promises well for the success of our cause; and the first column of the Bengal army marches on the Bolān Pass to-morrow morning. I have most confident expectations that the approach of his majesty will be cordially and generally welcomed,

and that in the recovery of his throne he will meet with little or no opposition. . . ."

It will soon be seen how slender were the grounds for these expectations. But at least they served to hearten a sick man nerving himself to an effort beyond his strength. For Allah Dad Khan was right after all. Half-a-dozen lines of formal acknowledgment was the utmost that will-power could achieve. Faint and dizzy, Pottinger fell back upon his pillow; while Allah Dad removed the instruments of evil, muttering curses upon them for having robbed his master of sense.

That night fever regained dominion over him; and for many days to come there could be no further question of wielding a pen. Throughout April convalescence was slow and intermittent. Outside on the plain, blossoms multiplied even among the stones of the foot-hills; and the fields, reclaimed by Pottinger's relief-works, were green with standing corn. But in the windowless houses of the city, heat had already become the arch-enemy, stealthily waxing in power from day to day and hindering the sick man's return to the normal activities of health.

Happily, in Herāt itself, surface quiet prevailed. Pottinger's arrangements for dispensing justice and mercy were by this time in fair working order: while Yar Mahomed carried on his secret intercourse with Persia unhampered by irksome supervision. Possibly this welcome respite, and the fact of Pottinger's illness, conspired to induce a rare mood of gratitude for his services. Certain it is, that during April he achieved a long letter to Government, reviewing in Bombastes' vein the chief events of the siege; extolling Afghan heroism and concluding with a tribute to his subaltern ally embroidered with flourishes peculiarly his own.

"Though Lieutenant Pottinger did not at once declare

himself—having no office under Government—yet never did his courage and resolution relax. He, taking himself to the craggy fissures of breaches, was present at every onset; drawing not his foot from the path of valour. Whatever we did in that long period, was done as he thought good; even until that last and greatest assault, when the dagger of the stout-hearted Afghan pierced the breast of the enemy and their sword was mowing down the head of the haughty; when the edge of the breach and the ditch was muddy with blood, and on all sides buttresses of slime were raised against the walls. So that again and again the Persians demanded one thing only, the dismissal of Lieutenant Pottinger from the town. So great has been the suffering since then, that even the sublime aforesaid lord could not put right the distracted affairs of the country. For this reason we are constantly arguing with him, though through no fault of our own: because every time hunger pinches us then we are hard on him."

A masterly perversion of the truth, this last; fitly capped by a modest reminder of his own "constant services and anxious efforts towards the victorious Government; looking that it should provide its loyal adherent with distinction and favour beyond bounds." In the face of effusions so plausible, a British envoy, wholly ignorant of Afghan character, may well have felt justified in cherishing delusive hopes; while Pottinger's strictures on the loyal adherent's conduct would naturally appear, by contrast, prejudiced, if not unjust.

But for the moment Yar Mahomed and his intrigues were thrust into the background of Macnaghten's mind by the exigencies, anxieties and distracting delays of that arduous upward march through countries friendly in

theory, bitterly hostile in fact. At the time of writing, he and his Shah still languished at Shikarpore, still vainly demanded carriage-cattle to help them forward. On the 20th they were cheered by the arrival of the entire Bengal Army under Sir Willoughby Cotton: but camels——? No: that was another pair of sleeves. The General, himself straitened for transport, was quick to resent "civil interference," even of the mildest. It was a case of two cocks in a hen run. Both men eyed each other with secret suspicion; and the outcome was a stormy interview in Sir Willoughby's tent, followed by a lamentable screed from Macnaghten to his late fellow-secretary, John Colvin.

"Sir W.," he complained, "is evidently disposed to look upon his Majesty, his disciplined troops and myself as mere cyphers. Any hint from me, however modestly given, was received with hauteur. I was told that I wanted to assume command of the army—that he, Sir W., knew no superior but Sir John Keane, and he would not be interfered with, etc., etc. . . . All this arose out of my requesting a thousand camels for the use of the Shah and his force. . . ."

Thus, at the first close contact, was struck once more that jarring chord of civil and military dissonance which was to be dominant throughout. But happily Macnaghten was by temperament, as by calling, a man of peace. Though quick to resent the least tendency to belittle his royal charge, he was determined not to lose his temper, and the two parted, at a late hour, very good friends.

During the three days' halt, Sir Willoughby and his travel-weary troops were zealous in entertaining his Majesty with reviews and parades: but the Shah himself —stout and thick-set, his beard dyed black, his unpleasant

face singularly devoid of intelligence or power—made no favourable impression on those bound over to espouse his cause. As for his former subjects, those to whom he vouchsafed audience at Shikarpore complained openly of their reception: "We have traversed our valleys and threaded the mountains of Beluch," said they, "only to kiss his footstool. And lo, he hath sent us back with aching hearts and bleeding feet, without even a kind look, much less a promise to feed on."

To the Englishmen about him he was always affable, if condescending: and Macnaghten's infatuation was proof even against omens more significant than the lamentations of a few Afghan chiefs.

On the 23rd Sir Willoughby's army moved on—camels included: 80,000 souls, of whom but 15,000 were fighting men—all dependent on an inefficient commissariat for food. It seems incredible that "no attempt was made to limit the numbers of an embarrassing rabble or diminish the lumbering baggage of the force." But so it was. Ignorant and unprovided for, they went forth into the desert, leaving the royal contingent to await the smaller Bombay column under Sir John Keane, now raised to supreme command by the retirement of Sir Henry Fane. Ill health and frank disapproval had induced the resignation of that consummate soldier, to the sincere regret of all ranks. In losing him, the army lost a master-spirit, a leader of real military ability, "which it is the fashion to despise; but which, on trial, few men are found to possess."

Keane—in spite of a Peninsular reputation—made the initial mistake of remaining with the slow-moving Bombay column, instead of pushing on at once and taking over supreme command of affairs. This devolved for a time on Sir Willoughby Cotton, whose military zeal—backed

by Macnaghten's fear of collusion between Persia and Kandahar—urged him to move on at once, unhampered by the royal cortège. And not until the 7th of March did Macnaghten, supported by Keane's column, thankfully turn his back on the arid desolation of Shikarpore.

By that time Cotton was nearing the far-famed Bolán Pass; and on the evening of March the 10th, after three months of journeying from Ferozepore—the last fortnight through a desert empty of forage—his advance guard encamped, at last, at the very gateway of the Bolán.

Throughout that fortnight the troops had paid heavy toll in suffering, and in loss of priceless baggage-cattle, for Macnaghten's weeks of idleness at Shikarpore. No information had been gathered, no arrangements made, either as regards water or supplies; and if the men suffered much, the animals of necessity suffered more. Horses grew weaker daily; camels, underfed and shamefully overladen, fell exhausted by the way, and were left to die—unharnessed of their loads. The Beluch marauders, ever on the alert, must have had a joyful time: more joyful still when, five days later, the unwieldy mass became entangled in the defiles of the Pass.

For sixty miles that stout-hearted army toiled and encamped, and toiled again, among rocks and boulders and sharp flint stones, incessantly fording and re-fording the river, which had carven for itself and them a rugged pathway through the barrier that walls in south-west Afghanistan. Thirteen times one day, eighteen times the next, did the straggling column splash and scramble through rushing water, so deep in places that a tall horse could hardly keep his legs. And the way they went was strewn with abandoned tents, ammunition, stores and

camels—always camels, till the stream of the Bolán was tainted, and men began to realize the worth of that most maddening, most invaluable aid to invasion, denounced by Tommy Atkins as "a devil and an ostrich and an orphan child in one."

And as if loss by misadventure were not enough, came urgent demands from Keane for camels and again more camels to relieve his own wretched plight. Mortified by Cotton's advance, he had wasted much precious time in an attempt to reach Quetta first by a doubtful route; and failing, coupled his request for carriage with an imperative order to halt at Quetta; an order whereby he gained nothing and imperilled the success of the whole expedition. "For eleven days he kept a body of fighting men on half rations . . . idly consuming their scanty supplies," and enduring privations that told severely on their health and spirits; when an advance by easy marches, husbanding their resources and jaded cattle, had been obviously the safest and wisest course. Possibly Cotton should not have gone forward, in the first place; but, having done so, he should not have been checked short of Kandahar.

Too soon it became known that Burnes—absent on a mission of persuasion at Khelāt—had altogether failed to convince the shrewd and vigorous old Khan that it was his duty to acknowledge Shah Shujah and smooth the way for his supporters, notwithstanding the devastation wrought by their presence in a land already suffering from a blighted harvest. Hitherto he had remained neutral, and had even been persuaded, against his will and judgment, to put his name to a treaty of friendship. For he frankly distrusted the Saddozai King, and as frankly criticized his method of reasserting his claim.

"He should have trusted to Afghans," the old chief

declared sagely, "instead of deluging the country with Hindustanis; an insult his own people will never forgive him. You English may place him by force upon the *Masnad*,[1] but as soon as you leave the kingdom, he will be driven beyond its borders."

In fine, Mehrab Khan cancelled the hated treaty and refused supplies. News of his disaffection and the difficulties of the road increased Macnaghten's eagerness to push on, with all speed, to Kandahar. But Keane, dreading the junction of three forces in a country so sterile and denuded, prevailed on him to halt for a week at Bagh: a week spent mainly in zealous efforts to conciliate resentful Beluchs, and charm away the King's increasing disgust with the men of his own race. Sick of the delays, dissensions and general discomfort of the march, Shah Shujah already seemed not merely undesired, but undesirous. "He says he never had so much trouble and bother in his lifetime," wrote Macnaghten to Lord Auckland; "and his opinion of the Afghan nation is, I regret to say, extremely low. . . . He declares they are a pack of dogs, one and all; . . . but we must try and win him gradually round to a more favourable opinion of his subjects."

The element of farce in this anomalous state of things had surely been obvious to any man salted with a grain of humour: but Macnaghten was blest with little or none of that saving grace which clarifies judgment and keeps its balance true. While at Bagh, his fears of Persia were revived by Pottinger's candid account of his second —and last—collision with the virtual rulers of Herāt. Haunted still by the bogey of Russo-Persian advance, he exaggerated the significance of a purely local disturbance. In spite of Pottinger's postscript showing how speedily

[1] Throne.

his decisive measures had cleared the air, the whole account was promptly forwarded to Calcutta, italicized by his own views and comments. The tenor of these may be gathered from his letter to Pottinger, written in the first flush of vexation and dismay—

"My dear Sir,

"I will not attempt to describe to you the extreme concern I have felt at learning this fresh misunderstanding between yourself and the Herāt authorities; and I am not without apprehension that the Governor-General will receive your own statement of the affair with much of uneasiness. You have related the occurrences with evident candour and fairness; and I trust that his Lordship will be prepared to make every allowance for the peculiarly difficult nature of your position at this distance from the scene of your employment. I can only recommend you in the most urgent manner to remember that the interests of your country are at stake; and I would strongly advise you, whenever practicable, to leave every point of difference to be adjusted between myself and the Herāt authorities."

On this master-stroke of advice comment is superfluous.

"You know how much I labour under the apprehension that you are interfering too minutely in the domestic affairs of the Herāt Government. Nothing is more likely than this to alienate the attachment of the Authorities; . . . but you will, I hope, be able to prevail upon Kamrān and Yar Mahomed to send confidential agents on their part to meet us at Kandahar. At that place I do not expect any opposition. . . . You will observe that I have not entered into any detailed investigation of your proceedings. When matters of such vast importance are pending, a retrospect is comparatively useless; and I feel

assured that you will now strain every nerve to make secure your present position, at least until our approach."

To this letter no definite reply is on record. Pottinger was still unwell when it reached him: and all that he chose to say for himself had already been said in his one exhaustive attempt at explaining the situation to men complacently incapable of perceiving its essential impossibility. And if Pottinger suffered on that account, Macnaghten, in his own degree, suffered also. He knew neither the people he designed to benefit, nor the king he thrust upon them at the point of the bayonet: and if, at the first, he rushed blindly in where angels might well have feared to tread, at the last he paid as dearly for his sins of ignorance as though they had been the blackest crimes in Newgate Calendar.

His dream of a conciliated and co-operating Yar Mahomed Khan was, like Charles II, "an unconscionable time a-dying": and in the meantime Pottinger must endure as best he might the implication that it was he, and not the Wazir, who impeded "more intimate relations" with Herāt.

XIV

On March the 27th, Cotton and his sorely tried troops emerged, at last, into the beautiful valley of Shāl, alive at this season with poignantly familiar sights and sounds of an English spring—fruit-blossoms, wild anemones, iris and tulips; buttercups, even, and the thrilling jubilance of larks. On the following day "headquarters" were established at Quetta—now one of India's finest frontier stations; then "a most miserable mud town with a small castle on a mound, and a small gun on a rickety carriage." Here arrangements were made for that ill-judged halt of eleven days in which men and animals, reduced almost to famine allowances, idly consumed the miserable remnants of forage and provisions that should have helped them forward to Kandahar, some fifteen marches ahead. Fifty miles on, another pass of unknown difficulty awaited them; yet it seems never to have occurred to Cotton that some sort of reconnaissance in that direction would have given occupation to the officers, and mitigated, in some degree, the evil of delay.

To the chiefs at Kandahar the halt implied timidity, and its ill-effect on the *morale* of all ranks was inevitable. Present sufferings were aggravated by dread of the future, by rumours of coming opposition and hourly evidence of a universal determination to hamper and harry, at every turn, the unwelcome supporters of an unwelcome king.

On the 1st of April came dispatches from Sir John Keane to the effect that he and the Shah hoped to enter the valley in three days' time. On the 4th Sir Willoughby

and his Staff rode out to meet them, and report upon a situation unpromising enough from every point of view.

Macnaghten listened, nothing dismayed, and that same evening rote to Calcutta: "Sir W. came in here this morning, and talks in the most gloomy strain of his prospects. He says we have but twelve days' supplies, and his men are already on quarter rations. . . . He is a sad croaker. Not content with telling me we must all be starved, he declares that Shah Shujah is very unpopular, and that we shall be opposed at every step of our progress. I think *I* know a little better than this——!"

The arrival at Quetta of King, Envoy and Commander-in-Chief was celebrated on the 6th with all honour: peals of ordnance, flourish of trumpets, glitter of bayonets and uniforms; for as yet khaki was not. And for one while, at least, there was no more talk of delay. Two hours later all heads of departments met in Sir Willoughby's tent; and afternoon brought the welcome order that the combined forces would march next morning for Kandahar. But thereto was appended another order, very far from welcome to those concerned. It was considered advisable that a brigade remain at Quetta to hold the province of Shāl and keep communications open in the rear. For this irksome but necessary duty Keane told off the 2nd Brigade under Major-General Nott, of subsequent Kandahar fame: and thereby hangs a tale.

In that crowded theatre of action a score or so of names stand boldly out from the mass, not always with enviable distinctness; and among these was perhaps no finer leader, nor any more remarkable man than William Nott, the rugged old Company's officer and bereaved husband, whose chance of distinction had come too late.

Though barely fifty-six, he had served John Company

with signal energy and devotion for over forty years. Uncompromising and straight-spoken to a fault, high-handed, warm-hearted, the very "abstract and impersonation of duty and justice," Nott was essentially a fighter; while yet he was deep-sighted enough to recognize the truth that "fighting is the least part of a soldier's duty." And this fiery, indomitable spirit was well matched by a frame equal to any demand either for action or endurance. A commanding brow, and features ruggedly aquiline as those of the great Duke himself, were redeemed from hardness by a mouth more humanly passionate and generous, and finely-shaped eyes that glowed with a fire and ardour too vital to be quenched by years. Even inconsolable grief, at loss of the wife he worshipped, only succeeded in deadening these for a time. So pronounced a personality could scarcely escape egotism; but in the main his faults were faults of temper. "He thought deeply, felt keenly, and spoke and wrote with scorching vehemence"; for he was not of those who suffer fools gladly. A strict disciplinarian, yet merciful and considerate withal, he was better beloved by the men who served under him than by his brother officers or superiors, who were too often repelled by his reserve and independent bearing. He would flatter no man's vanity; and though most of his judgments were right in the main, an aggressive insistence on the fact tended to alienate sympathy if it did not engender active dislike.

At the time when Lord Auckland's proclamation set all India astir there were those who considered Colonel Nott the finest regimental chief of his day; though his claim to distinction rested mainly on the fact that he had, without a murmur of opposition, restored the unsettled condition of three regiments by a simple course of justice and equity that will always reconcile brave men

to discipline, however strict. But so deep-seated was the prejudice against him in high places that Fane had with difficulty insisted on promoting him to the rank of Major-General and command of a brigade. "Colonel Nott is the best officer you have," said he at length; "I cannot go without him." For which ultimatum England had reason to be grateful in the years that followed.

Who it was that had secretly maligned a tried soldier and an upright man will never be known. But prejudice, however engendered, cannot have been allayed by his vigorous protests against the clash of civil and military authority on active service, and against the frequent supersession of Company's field officers by giving the local rank of Colonel to certain Lieutenant-Colonels in the Queen's army while serving in India. To this order Sir Henry Fane added another conferring the rank of Major-General in the same circumstances. The whole question is too complex and remote to be considered in detail. Fair or unfair, it certainly engendered much heart-burning and injustice on both sides, and served to increase the deplorable jealousy then existing between the sister services of the Company and the Queen.

Four days after the publication of the Afghan manifesto Nott was stunned, in the midst of his preparations, by the sudden death of the wife he had loved for three-and-thirty years, with a passionate, yet exalted devotion characteristic of the man. So sudden, so prostrating was the blow, that for a time it was as if light were turned to darkness. Promotion, and the chances of distinction, were dust and ashes in his mouth now that the beloved woman was no longer there to take pride in them. Two unmarried daughters left on his hands added anxiety to grief, while yet their need of him gave him courage to face the prospect of living on alone.

Before leaving Delhi he sent them to join their elder brother in Calcutta, promising to take care of himself for their sakes. "But for you, all would be a blank, and I would turn back to-morrow if I could," he wrote after the parting. "I once anticipated pleasure from this expedition—now all is exquisite misery." And again: "I would rather hide my grey head in some clay-built cottage, did not others depend on me. . . . My dear wife left me before I got this—and now it is too late."

But time, the merciful healer, deadened the pain that could never be quite conjured away. Action, change of scene and the natural resilience of the man helped also, as his constant letters to his "children" serve to show. From the first his sympathies were not with the Puppet King; and he stands out notably as one of the few Englishmen capable of seeing the whole affair from the Afghan point of view. "I really believe," he wrote, "that the people of Afghanistan will *not* give up their country without fighting for it; *I know I would not were I in their situation.*"

From the first also he was strongly prepossessed in favour of the Afghans themselves. "Very fine-looking fellows," was his verdict; "I like them very much. . . . One man I met yesterday was the finest fellow I've ever seen; quite the gentleman. He spoke Hindustani very well—and asked me why we were marching into his country. I told him merely for the purpose of putting his rightful king upon the throne. He said, 'We prefer Dōst Mahomed.' I said, 'He has no right to the throne.' I shall not forget the fine expression of his large black eyes. Stepping up to me and placing his hand on my shoulder, he said in a bold but respectful tone, 'What right have *you* to Benares and Delhi? Why, the same

right that our Dōst Mahomed has to Kabul—and he will keep it.'"

So much for the Afghans. As to the "grand military promenade" undertaken for their special and particular benefit—he had nothing but praise for the Army itself; while adding with characteristic frankness, "The Government only made one blunder. On that fine soldier Sir Henry Fane giving up the command, they failed to give this beautiful force a competent leader! There was no foresight, no military knowledge: a wild expenditure of public money and a reckless disregard for the welfare of our troops . . . Sir John Keane's appointment was, from the first, a 'dirty job'; and it has nearly given the death-blow to our expedition."

Keane, a brave though not brilliant soldier, and a rough-mannered, somewhat prejudiced man, was also, it should be added, a Queen's officer; and Nott—prejudiced also—held the drastic opinion that no Queen's officer, whatever his talents, should hold high command in India. Whatever his grounds, at that time, for so sweeping an assertion, the fact remains that the woefully ill-conducted "promenade" was mainly commanded by officers of the royal service. For himself, Nott had managed, by unstinted forethought and personal expenditure, to keep his troops and cattle in better condition than most; and now, arrived at Quetta, behold the heart-broken man—for whom action was the sole anodyne to grief—condemned to the inglorious rôle of *chokidar* while "Queen's Generals" went forward into the promised land.

And there was more than this, which would have been stoically accepted as fortune of war, had he not divined prejudice at work. On Sir Willoughby's temporary promotion to supreme command, Fane had put Nott in his place at the head of the Bengal division; and now that

Cotton returned to his former rank, Nott hoped, reasonably enough, that Keane would leave him undisturbed and give Sir Willoughby the vacated Bombay command. His feelings, then, may be imagined when he learnt that no divisional command was to be his. Instead, he was to lose the step gained and revert to his original brigade; the Bombay division being assigned to General Willshire —a Queen's officer and a local Major-General! Here, indeed, was insult heaped on injury! This second slight —not to himself merely, but to the Company for whose honour he was consumingly jealous—filled his cup of bitterness to overflowing, and goaded him into open remonstrance, whether politic or no.

Immediately upon Keane's arrival at Quetta he presented himself, and was told that Sir Willoughby had been returned to his former command by "particular orders of the Governor-General"—which he did not choose to believe: also that the same high authority had ordered a whole brigade to garrison Quetta—which again he did not believe.

Sir John pointed out that by remaining with his brigade the General would virtually command the entire province of Shāl.

The General retorted that he had no urgent desire to command that province. In fact, personally, he cared very little about the division. His only wish was to proceed with the army.

"Consider, your Excellency," he urged, with increasing warmth: "I am senior to all present except Sir Willoughby. It is natural I should feel the hardship and injustice of being left behind when all my juniors are going forward."

To which Sir John made answer bluntly, "I am sorry for your disappointment, but I can't help that."

And Nott, chafing under the conviction that he would not if he could: "At least your Excellency must be aware that the advancing column is almost entirely composed of Bengal troops; that it will contain four of her Majesty's Generals, and not one of the Company's unless I go."

Keane shook his head. "I have my orders as regards Quetta; and I have chosen your brigade because a part of it is still behind."

"But one regiment of it is here, and I trust I may be allowed to proceed with that corps."

Such persistence was more than Keane had bargained for. "By Gad, sir, your conduct for a general officer is the most extraordinary I have ever heard of! Do you imagine I can upset Government commands for your personal benefit? And after all, you will be in a far more responsible position than any General who goes on with the army. When the rest of your brigade arrives, how do you know that you may not be ordered to take Khelāt?"

But Nott's temper was rising. He dismissed this ironic attempt at consolation with a scornful laugh.

"Well, your Excellency," he broke out hotly, "since you are determined to deprive me of my division, and equally determined that I shall not go on with the portion of my brigade now here, I beg to resign my command."

Sir John raised his eyebrows. "You had better consult your friends before you take such a step."

"That advice is quite superfluous. I have lived long enough to possess a judgment of my own. I see, and I have long seen, through the whole of this affair."

The Commander-in-Chief pondered for a few seconds on this astonishingly direct statement. "I can only take your resignation in one form," said he. "Forward it to

Government. I suppose, sir, you will obey my orders in the meantime?"

"I *must* obey your orders. But to send my resignation through Government would quite defeat my present object —that of accompanying the army to-morrow as a private gentleman."

Keane regarded him in open amazement. "I can only repeat, sir, that your conduct is most extraordinary. Sir Willoughby Cotton does not feel aggrieved, why should you?"

"I am no judge of his feelings. Besides—*he* is going on. But I have no more to say on that score. There remains my just claim to the other division. Your Excellency is aware that *I* hold the Queen's commission of Major-General, and have therefore a prior right to officers holding local rank. Yet you have given General Wiltshire the command in preference to me."

Once again Sir John pleaded the receipt of "particular orders," adding coldly, "If you think yourself aggrieved you can appeal to the Court of Directors. Evidently nothing *I* can say will convince you."

"No, your Excellency. Nothing you *have* yet said has been at all convincing."

"General Nott, you insult my authority!"

At that Nott rose to his feet—a fine, soldierly figure—his grey head erect, smouldering fire in his eyes. "I am not aware of having done anything of the kind. I have merely stated my deliberate, unalterable judgment; and I trust I have left no ill impression on your mind by speaking the truth. I see the whole affair. I am to be sacrificed because I happen to be senior to the Queen's officers."

"Ill impression, sir! By Gad, I shall never forget your conduct as long as I live!"

"Indeed, your Excellency?" Nott bowed ceremoniously and stepped back toward the door. "In that case I have only to wish you a very good evening!"

For the moment there was no more to be said or done. But there was much to follow, as events shall show.

Next day Sir John Keane marshalled his sadly crippled forces and set out for Kandahar, leaving behind him a very inadequate protective force and his finest General smarting under a bitter sense of wrong. Not even the song of birds, the music of streams, the scent and colour of a thousand roses, had power to heal Nott's wounded spirit, or curb his impatience at the needless suffering and loss inflicted on first-rate troops by sheer mismanagement in all directions. Incurably reserved with the world at large, he poured forth his feelings and opinions to the children of his heart with a vehemence and a candour peculiarly his own.

"If I could get my brigade together," he wrote a few weeks after Keane's departure, "I should be able to snore in quiet while five Queen's generals are gathering laurels at Kandahar; but what has a Company's officer to do *but* to snore? What right can forty years' service give *him* to command? *None*, as long as commanders-in-chief are appointed at the Horse Guards; but the Company's officers may thank their own apathy for this and all the gross insults heaped upon them. Oh! I have witnessed such scenes on this grand expedition. By Heavens! two thousand disciplined troops would have sent this army back in disgrace; but good fortune, backed by many lakhs of Jack Company's rupees, paves the way and puts down opposition. During a long life I have read much, but I have never seen, heard or read of such a shameful and entirely unnecessary waste of public money. As to the commissariat, no language can describe it, nor

give any idea of the rascality of its native agents. This department has, moreover, proved itself totally inefficient; there is not a native understrapper attached to it who has not plundered a fortune; while the poor subaltern officer has been involved in debt, and half starved into the bargain."

These strictures, though harshly worded, were just, in the main. The annals of Indian campaigning hardly furnish a parallel to the miseries and losses endured by that unopposed "Army of the Indus"—lauded by Nott, the hypercritical, as the "most efficient and best-equipped force" ever assembled in the country.

On the 19th of April he addressed to the Governor-General-in-Council his protest against unjust supersession, which must needs be sent *via* Sir John Keane.

Days grew to weeks, and weeks to months—during which time Nott had rewritten his protest three times. But the gods were silent; and inquiry brought always the same answer: "Not received."

Finally conviction was thrust upon him that even "in this very just world there are men who see no harm in 'burking' papers which are not exactly palatable!" And hard upon conviction followed the resolve to break through the rules of the service by writing yet another copy and sending it direct to the fountain-head of justice.

But by that time the appeal would arrive too late to do him any good. Sir John Keane had gained his end.

XV

But in April, Keane had still to reach Kandahar and to marshal his half-starved, heavily-hampered force through the Khojak Pass. No attempt had been made by Cotton to gauge its difficulties, or to discover an easier route; and, as usual, the sins of the leaders were visited most heavily on the men and animals given into their charge. Opposition was conspicuous by its absence. So, also, were fresh water, forage and food. Day after day, strength and spirit were sapped by an invincible enemy at whom none could strike a straightforward blow. All ranks would have been thankful for the stimulant of resistance, however stubborn; for an occasional fight to fire the blood and dispel the conviction that the grinding misery they endured was unnecessary to boot: mere escort duty where they had looked for war.

Once indeed there came a cheering rumour that a body of "invulnerable horsemen with charmed lives" were advancing to destroy the infidels root and branch. But, like a mirage of the desert, those invulnerable ones vanished at close quarters; dwindled, in fact, to a party of vedettes who had boldly ridden forth to reconnoitre, and, at sight of British bayonets gleaming for the first time on an Afghan ridge, had saluted the officers with a few long shots, and ridden quietly back to Kandahar.

But if Afghan chiefs were inactive, the marauding tribes were not. Like a swarm of angry wasps they buzzed about the rearguard, plundering camels and stores, murdering stragglers and generally enjoying themselves

to the top of their bent. Worse than all, before Kandahar was reached 27,000 rounds of musket ammunition and much spare powder had fallen into their hands.

Disheartening work indeed! But in defiance of thirst, hunger, forced marches and heart-breaking delay, resolution and patriotism held their own. For man has a spirit in him to sustain infirmities of the flesh: a boon denied to his long-suffering servants the camel and the horse. On the former, indeed, the army depended for its very life. One camel-load of flour, alone, represented a day's rations for one hundred and sixty men, and for twice that number when half rations were in vogue. Yet were these priceless animals the greatest sufferers in this tragical military display: and the scenes of that march, it has been said, would have afforded fine scope for an advocate for preventing cruelty to animals. There was much barbaric splendour in the triple camps of Shah, Envoy and Commander-in-Chief; but woefully little regard for the welfare of those who had borne it all upon their backs, till they fell by the wayside and were left for vultures to devour alive. Between Sindh and Kandahar no less than 20,000 camels died of hunger and merciless overloading, and their burdens enriched the marauders of Beluchistan.

As to the horses, their plight was little better. Day by day the hearts of cavalrymen and Horse Gunners grew heavier within them, at sight of the havoc wrought in beloved squadrons and batteries since the days of pomp and circumstance at Ferozepore. Before leaving Quetta, sixty horses had been shot; the first week's march killed a hundred and sixteen more, and few of those that survived could be ridden without brutality. By the time Kandahar was reached, the 3rd Cavalry, alone, was in good order and nearly complete.

But while each day of that last terrible three weeks seemed to increase the miseries of man and beast, each evening found them ten or twelve miles nearer to the end. On the 21st they emerged from the Khojak Pass, and, except for lack of water, no further obstacle lay between them and Kandahar. Shah Shujah, haunted of late by earlier unsuccessful adventures, plucked up heart when Hādji Khan, Kākur, a notorious turncoat, rode into his camp at the head of a hundred horsemen, and unblushingly plighted an Afghan's faith to the power that seemed likest to win. Letters had arrived also by the hand of Pottinger's old friend Syud Mohun Shah, stating the terms on which the Barakzai brothers were prepared to submit. Macnaghten would have none of these; and despite the inevitable Afghan bluster, it seemed probable that the alternative to submission would be flight: a prospect calculated to cure the royal attack of nerves.

Now, for the first time, King and Envoy rode in the van: and, to Macnaghten's unbounded delight, they entered Kandahar on the 25th, escorted by a cheering, shouting populace, well in advance of Keane and his bedraggled army.

That last, after a waterless march of fifteen miles, cared nothing at all for Kandahar or kings. One thought, one longing was in the minds of all: "The river—the river!" There was magic, at once, and torment in the very word. For a week and more, driblets of water, brackish or fœtid, had been their portion; while the heat in tents was often over a hundred degrees. Some, in their anguish, had thankfully swallowed liquid mud: and now, at sight of clear rushing water, more than enough for all, neither self-control nor discipline could check the simultaneous rush to the river's bank, the wild mêlée of men and animals, scrambling over each other in mad haste

to find relief; so that many fell, utterly exhausted, and died in the very water that should have saved their lives.

But for those that survived the worst was over. Two more marches brought them to the south gate of Kandahar, and it was plain to all that there could be no thought of further advance for weeks to come.

By the 4th of May the last of the stragglers had reported themselves; and now, except for one brigade, Keane's entire army was encamped without the walls: a battered and ill-used army indeed; yet in efficiency, pluck and spirit, as fine a body of men as any leader could wish to command. Among the higher ranks more than a little incompetence might prevail: Nott—anticipating conflict with Russia—might invoke the spirits of Wellesley and Hastings, since these our dwarfish days "could not produce a single Giant to hurl the Bear back to his native snows": yet, among the captains and subalterns, aye, and among the much-maligned politicals of that disastrous Afghan war, were the very giants who were to win and mould the Punjab; not to mention a score of Mutiny heroes, whose names are written in brass upon India's scroll of honour. Outram and Havelock, twin Bayards of the Lucknow relief, were there; the last as A.D.C. to Sir Willoughby Cotton. George Lawrence was there, a captain of Light Cavalry; while Henry had already earned distinction by his exertions at Ferozepore. He, too, as a budding political, was to be drawn into the vortex of action before the end came. Henry Durand, James Abbott, Nevil and Crawford Chamberlain all endured the hardships of that terrible march: and in '41, a subaltern named John Nicholson journeyed up with George Broadfoot's column, through the Khyber to Jalālabad.

Since the day of Wellesley and Hastings there had been

a lull and a passing decline. But the race of giants was by no means extinct; nor will be, while even a dozen men remain on earth who have faith in God and in their own immortal souls. Of such there were many in the Army of the Indus that halted to take breath and await further orders outside the Kandahar gate.

They learnt, on arrival, that the Barakzai chiefs had retreated to a fort on the Herāt road, and that Shah Shujah had been welcomed by his former subjects "with feelings almost amounting to adoration." Such was Macnaghten's gilded version of a short-lived curiosity and excitement—signifying nothing.

Two weeks later, the measure of this chimerical adoration was clearly revealed. For on the 8th of May, Macnaghten inaugurated a public recognition of the long-lost sovereign on a great plain north of the city, where five years earlier he had suffered crushing defeat.

To celebrate so joyful an event, the troops were turned out at daybreak, eight thousand of them, in "truly admirable condition," for all the ardours and privations of their unforgettable march. Shah Shujah himself, with Sir John Keane, the British Mission and a following of Syuds, rode forth of the gate that is called Eed-ghur to the stirring salute of a hundred and one guns. But on this day there was little or no cheering, no eager, curious crowd. The voice of the cannon was more in evidence throughout than the voice of the people: a prophetic omen of that which was to come. By way of throne a carpet and three large pillows were set on a platform, under a canopy of scarlet and gold. Here his Afghan Majesty sat cross-legged, while two meanly-clad attendants waved above his head *chowries* made from tails of the sacred Thibetan cow. Below, on chairs, sat the military and political chiefs. British troops passed in

review before him; British officers saluted him; while he in return extolled the disinterested benevolence of the British Government, in bringing about an event whose "moral influence would be felt from Constantinople to Pekin!"

And those for whose benefit this grand transformation scene had been wrought—what of them?

Even many who approved the so-called restoration were forced to admit that the Afghans themselves seemed strangely, disconcertingly outside the picture. The Barakzai brothers at Kandahar had been far from popular; and for the moment any change was acceptable. But the new King had now been with them a fortnight; and it seemed that the more they looked at him and his halo of bayonets the less they appreciated either. The common people thronged in thousands upon mosque and city walls; but even the novel magnificence of a British review did not draw more than a few hundreds out on to the plain; and the space behind the throne assigned, in the diplomatic programme, to "the populace restrained by the Shah's troops" remained, throughout, a bitter satire on the display of the morning.

Yet Macnaghten could not or would not see anything amiss; and whatever the Shah's feelings may have been they kept strict purdah behind his empty-looking expanse of brow and supercilious eyes. Not so his hatred of the fugitive brothers, whom he frankly urged Macnaghten to pursue. Accordingly on the 12th of May—placable measures having failed—a strong detachment marched out under Colonel Robert Sale, and crossed the Helmund in full flood, only to find that the ex-chiefs had fled to seek refuge in Persia, where they honoured the Asylum of the Universe with a friendly visit that lasted a matter of three years.

It soon became evident, even to Macnaghten, that the powerful tribe of the Ghilzais—primal lords of the land—had no mind to accept British overtures, or place their necks under the Saddozai yoke—let money and promises be never so lavishly scattered abroad. There remained the Durānis, from whom the Shah might reasonably hope better things. But these had been so impoverished and oppressed that not enough manhood seemed left in them either for resistance or support.

As the grandson of Ahmed Shah and enemy of the Barakzai Sirdars, the King himself was a desirable change; and fiercely though they resented the halo of British bayonets, policy prompted them to render formal allegiance, while greed whispered that the inevitable might yet be turned to good account. So they thronged about the throne, demanding extravagant rewards for their supposed forbearance, and bargaining for the revival of ancient privileges that would soon have swept more than half the state revenues into their hands. Friendship of this complexion proved more embarrassing than Ghilzai hostility. Refusal were impolitic; but the awkward fact remained that, although British guns had saluted Shah Shujah king at Kandahar, his throne was yet to win. Dōst Mahomed still ruled at Kabul. If his brothers were hated, he was not; and weeks of enforced delay at Kandahar would give him time, in plenty, to concentrate troops at Ghazni, the strongest fortress in the land.

But, on this rare occasion, the stumbling-block that might have ruined all, proved instead the stepping-stone to a brief success, which many would gladly have forfeited could they have guessed the end. For Dōst Mahomed, puzzled by unreliable rumours and by the unaccountable halt in Western Afghanistan, finally misconstrued its object to his own destruction. With bitterness and

mortification, but without surprise, he had accepted the bloodless surrender of Kandahar. From brothers so cowardly and treacherous he had expected no less. But he and his sons—praise be to Allah—were made of manlier stuff. For the present he must needs console himself with the open hostility of the Ghilzais and of the stout-hearted Mehrab Khan, chief of Khelāt. These he urgently incited to further resistance. "Do not trust the words of the accursed English," was the burden of his war-cry. "Be not deceived by their knavery and money. . . . If God favours me, you shall share my honours and riches. Let everything be sacrificed for the Faith. May the Kafir-Feringhis be the food of the sword and all their wealth be ours!" To such blood-thirsty revilings had Lord Auckland driven the man, who, but a year earlier, had begged almost humbly for practical recognition as an ally and a friend.

From the halt at Kandahar he augured a preliminary advance on Herāt, a belief confirmed by news of a force under Colonel Wade approaching the Khyber Pass. Always on the alert for trouble in that permanent storm-quarter the Punjab, he promptly sent thither the pick of his army under his favourite and most redoubtable son, Akbar Khan, as handsome, daring and resourceful a leader as the heart of Afghan father could desire. A second son held the fortress of Ghazni; while a third hovered in that neighbourhood with intent to harry the advancing troops.

But, for all the unquenchable eagerness of officers and men, no immediate hope of a move enlivened the monotonous weeks spent under canvas throughout the increasing heat of May. And as heat increased, sickness increased also—fever, dysentery and jaundice, the curse of that

region. Reaction from the strain and excitement of daily marching, daily change of scene, wrought cruel work among the European and Bengal troops. Provisions were still scarce, money even more so; and an army without cavalry-horses or camels was as a man without legs. Plainly there was nothing to do but await a more hopeful turn of the wheel; and in the interval, Macnaghten's ever-active mind returned afresh to the problem of Herāt.

Before the end of the month came an official letter from Simla expressing "deep concern" at renewed friction with the authorities, and confirming his own opinion that an officer of higher standing should be sent to superintend affairs in that quarter. Lord Auckland bade him despatch the highest in rank and most trusted political officer at his disposal, to draw up a special report of the present dispositions and requirements of those semi-mythical monsters, Shah Kamrān and Yar Mahomed Khan.

Now the highest political at Macnaghten's disposal was Sir Alexander Burnes. But Sekundur the Great had no mind to thrust his ungloved hand into a hornets' nest, or to eat again of the Dead Sea fruit of failure. He was clever enough to foresee the fate of any upright Englishman who pitted himself against the Herāt Wazir, and to succeed Macnaghten at Kabul was the private wish of his heart. But these were not matters for open speech. He merely acknowledged the compliment and declined the offer, which devolved, by a natural sequence, on Major D'Arcy Todd, the former assistant of Sir John McNeill. Todd, though infected with something of Macnaghten's optimism, answered frankly that he was willing to do his utmost, but saw little chance of success. Engineer and artillery officers were to accom-

pany him for the purpose of strengthening Herāt fortifications at British expense. In return for these favours, the authorities were expected to ratify the treaty of friendship and alliance whereon Macnaghten had set his heart. A plain-spoken letter from Pottinger, dated the 4th of May, might well have shaken the convictions of a man less securely armoured against the slings and arrows of discouraging facts.

"The Wazir's real aim," wrote the one man who could speak from intimate and painful experience, "is to get sufficient money to assume an independent attitude and then keep up the supply by threatening his neighbours. He has no idea of finance or of increasing the prosperity of his country. . . . Even amongst Afghans he is an ambitious and engrossing man, and Kamrān nourishes the hope of possessing the whole kingdom of Ahmed Shah. If he were a man the Wazir feared, things might go well; but he is ten times the greater tyrant; and if Government does not wish to interfere in internal affairs—which is the most advisable plan—we can only restore justice and security by removing one or the other. Without a force, we only hold our situation here by the payment of money, which Kamrān and his minister will use every means of falsehood and fraud to procure from us, while giving not a single iota to the general interest. With two such men and their followers, accustomed to live by rapine, you may judge what hope we have of restoring prosperity to this country. For my part—I have none."

Such uncomfortable convictions were not at all to Macnaghten's taste. They served only to increase his desire for the opinion of a man whose view of Central Asian politics squared more nearly with his own. This is not to assert that his personal friend and Military

Secretary was dispatched with intent to displace Pottinger; but there can be little doubt that Todd's presence at Herāt was intended for the thin end of the wedge. Lord Auckland's desire was that no Mission be sent till Macnaghten had received a deputation from Yar Mahomed Khan; and although May was now far advanced, he still looked in vain for that cloud of dust on the Herāt road.

As a matter of fact Nazu Khan, Topshi Bāshi, had set out late in April; and before he reached Kandahar Pottinger had induced Kamrān's son, Prince Sekunder, with a party of Eimak chiefs, to follow in his wake. This had been no easy matter, for the fall of Kandahar had stirred up very mixed feelings in Herāt and the country round. Yar Mahomed himself began to grow suspicious of England's ultimate intentions. The disinterested benevolence theory, belauded by Shah Shujah, could never for one flickering instant convince the Wazir. Local chiefs were in a turmoil. Pottinger was beset with an onslaught of questions, to which, from lack of knowledge, he could seldom give accurate replies.

In his own words: "The more Government wrote of their confidence in me, the more was expected from me; and my non-ability to answer their questions as to our intentions in Afghanistan roused suspicion of impending danger. After a great deal of trouble, I arranged that some of the more turbulent people should go with the king's son to acknowledge Shah Shujah; and I wrote to Mr. Macnaghten that I wanted them well treated, as I had chiefly got rid of them to allow me time to receive fuller instructions about the country. I begged that he would let me see him before deciding on any definite line of action, and I also begged him to be specially cautious with the chiefs who had gone down, as they were very inimical to us. The Envoy, panic-stricken, stopped the

party, and would not let it come on for some time; and eventually the answer I received to my requests was a copy of a treaty concluded between Sir William and the Topshi Bāshi, an unaccredited agent; and this treaty, I was told, Major Todd had been appointed to bring here for ratification, under the title of Envoy."

With what feelings Eldred Pottinger read this astonishing communication may be judged from his sole recorded comment: "I immediately applied for leave of absence, intending to throw up the appointment."

For more than eighteen months he had done his utmost to promote England's interests, and—which is of far greater moment—to uphold her character for truth and justice against formidable odds: now, by way of recognition, he received a treaty drawn up without a word of reference to himself, in the face of his urgent and justifiable request to the contrary. As for the Mission, he could but await its arrival, and talk matters over with D'Arcy Todd, whose sympathetic and generous spirit could be relied upon to mitigate an unpleasant position.

But not until the 25th of June did the new Herāt Envoy, with seven picked officers and two lakhs of treasure, to make the rough places plain, set out from Kandahar. Todd was singularly blessed in the men chosen to accompany him: Captain Saunders, with three engineer subalterns, Edward Conolly, Abbott and North; Richmond Shakespear, then a subaltern of Artillery; Dr. Ritchie, and Dr. John Login, the last an Orkney-man, already distinguished for remarkable talent, force of character and an insatiable appetite for work. An adventure of very uncertain issue lay before them; but all were men of courage, equal to any fortune, good or bad; and, before leaving, they were heartened by the knowledge that within a day or two Sir John Keane's recrudescent army was to march on Kabul, taking Ghazni by the way.

Two long-looked-for convoys of grain and treasure had appeared at last; but, to Keane's bitter disappointment, the first proved useless for his advancing troops. Not even golden persuasion could induce the Lohāni merchant or his followers to stir beyond Kandahar. Their camels? Yes, they would sell their camels. But without drivers these would be as devils unchained. There was nothing for it but to leave the priceless grain bags at Kandahar, where an efficient force must be quartered to hold the western capital of Afghanistan.

Sick to the heart of enforced delays, he decided, there and then, to advance with half rations, relying on the later harvest of the highlands to save the situation. Now, every leader worthy of the name is prepared, if needs must, to face risks and face them boldly; yet, even in the pitiless game of war, unnecessary risk of human life is rightly reckoned a grievous military error. In spite of this Sir John Keane added to his first risk another—more serious still. He decided to dispense with his siege battering guns, and even came near to accepting a suggestion from Macnaghten that difficulties of food and transport might be lessened by leaving all European troops at Kandahar. Between ignorance of the country and the prevailing dearth of almost every requisite, save courage, his position bristled with difficulties. For all he knew, Kabul and Ghazni had yet to be taken by assault or by siege. None had seen the last, save D'Arcy Todd and Leech—a sapper subaltern on political duty. Both described the most redoubtable fortress in the country as "a place of little strength"; while Macnaghten—despite flagrant proofs of Ghilzai hostility—was ready to "stake his credit that not a shot would be fired in opposition to Shah Shujah's march on Kabul."

Happily for his own reputation and his country's

prestige, Keane, in his perplexity, discussed the matter with Captain Thompson of the engineers.

Thompson, who possessed a soldier's head in addition to a soldier's courage, looked grave at mention of Macnaghten's proposal.

"Whatever the strength of Ghazni," said he, "at least we know it is occupied in force. The son of Dōst Mahomed may be counted on to make a vigorous defence; and—since your Excellency has seen fit to ask my opinion—may I be allowed to remind you that the ultimate responsibility is yours—and yours only. Would the failure and disgrace of a British army be excused by the plea that you acted on Mr. Macnaghten's political assurances and advice?"

"Good God, no!" Sir John answered with decision. "But the deuce of it is we're so confoundedly in their hands."

"For information—yes. But not necessarily for advice. And even in respect of the former, has your Excellency, in any single instance, found political information to be correct?"

"I'm damned if I have!" the old soldier retorted, with a laugh. "Even if we must eat shoe-leather, the English troops shall go. But Stevenson swears the bullocks are totally unfit to drag the siege guns."

So the matter was settled, and one fatal error, at least, nipped in the bud.

On the 27th of June Shah Shujah with his envoy and an "escort" of 4300 fighting men began his triumphal march on Kabul. But the siege battering guns, which had been dragged, at enormous cost, over a thousand miles of country—far more heart-breaking than any that lay ahead—were left, with an unconscious touch of irony, to ornament the tamely-surrendered city of Kandahar.

XVI

Those last critical weeks of June and July were not soon to be forgotten by Dōst Mahomed Khan, sometime friend of the English; now goaded into fierce hostility at sight of troops and money lavished on his thrice-beaten, thrice-accursed foe, who could not stand upon his own feet one hour without support. A bitter comment, indeed, on the cheap presents and lean diet of sympathy meted out to himself when he had begged a little support, a little recognition, in return for friendly alliance with England, and England alone.

Now not merely the man in him rebelled, but the Mahomedan chief, who saw his country overrun with infidels and despised "Hindustanis"; saw, too, with bitterness unspeakable, that he could not even count upon his own people to make a stubborn, concerted stand against this helpless King, hoisted on to the *masnad* by Feringhi bayonets and Feringhi gold.

Look where he would, troubles, that are by nature gregarious, buzzed about him like a swarm of awakened bees. In place of friendship, enmity; in place of loyal support, treachery and rebellion. Even in Kabul itself disaffection grew and stirred. The Kazzilbashes of the Persian quarter were no longer reliable. The Kohistan was ripe for rebellion—fostered, if not engendered, by the secret machinations of one Mohun Lal, Munshi to Alexander Burnes: a travelled Bengali, possessed of some talent, a flourishing conceit of himself, and a genius for traitor-making, "the lustre of which remained un-

dimmed to the end of the war." Frankly glorying in this questionable gift, he himself relates how a known enemy of the Amir was brought by him to the favourable notice of Sir Alexander Burnes, who sent him a large sum of money from Kandahar to raise the Kohistanis against Dōst Mahomed Khan.

Thus the once powerful ruler found himself enmeshed on all sides, like a lion caught in a net. Yet to the very last he trusted in two things—the strength of Ghazni and the loyalty of his sons. Ghazni—*Dar-us-Sultánat*,[1] impregnable through the ages—would never, surely, be taken by assault; and, if besieged, might well keep the Feringhis occupied for many months.

So thought the Amir; not without reason. The thoughts of Sir John Keane, when at length he looked upon that redoubtable fortress, are not on record. It is conceivable that they echoed Captain Thomson's remark about political information, in terms too forcible for print.

The sixty-foot ramparts of the citadel, set high upon a swelling spur, beneath a wide semicircle of hills, seemed silently to mock at the light field-pieces advancing against it. Keane's practised eye saw at a glance that here were ramparts too formidable for mining or escalading; ramparts not to be breached by six- or nine-pounder guns. And the heavy siege-train was lying idle at Kandahar! Here, too, were men obviously intent on resistance; though Gholam Hyder Khan, son of Dōst Mahomed, must have quailed when he stood upon the ramparts and scanned through his telescope the surging, purposeful mass of hostility that bore down upon him in the dawn of a radiant July morning.

Seen from a height, the effect of that moving concourse

[1] Seat of the Sultan's power.

—a hundred thousand all told—was fairly overwhelming. Front and rear, so far as eye could reach, the plain was alive with ordered columns of horse and foot, with guns, camels and baggage-cattle innumerable, veiled in a vast dust-cloud of their own creation that, from afar, imparted an ominous air of mystery to the whole.

But, for all its imposing array, Sir John Keane's army lacked the two essentials of conquest—supplies and heavy guns. The first lack debarred him from the wiser course of simply masking Ghazni and moving on at once to take Dōst Mahomed by surprise; the second vetoed all hope of breaching the walls. An unpleasant predicament, and one that must have seriously damaged Keane's reputation, had not two incongruous elements combined to avert disaster—Mohun Lal's genius for traitor-making and the cool daring of three young engineers.

The Munshi's services are recorded by himself with an ingenuous complacency all his own. "It was discovered that we are to meet opposition in the stronghold of Afghanistan. I therefore sent a note to my old friend Abul Reshed, nephew of Dōst Mahomed, that if he leaves Hyder Khan and will join our camp, I will introduce him to the Envoy and his luck shall shine. He attended my advice, and . . . in fact, gave such valuable information . . . that Lord (then Sir John) Keane recommended him strongly to the Envoy, and got 500 rupees fixed for him from the Mission treasury."

Valuable information indeed! To this highly-paid renegade Keane owed the knowledge that Ghazni, like Achilles, possessed one vulnerable spot—the Kabul Gate. All the others had been solidly built up with masonry; and if this one could be blown open, the fortress might be carried by a *coup de main*. The assault must needs be one of simple daring; and success, if obtained, would

be bought with much blood. "War has its principles; and to hazard . . . soldiers' lives and a country's fame on a gamester's throw is not reckoned among them." But it was not in human nature to reject the one chance whereby a flagrant error might be promptly and brilliantly redeemed.

The order was given—and executed in gallant, masterly style.

At dawn on the 22nd, while the attention of the garrison was beguiled by a false attack on the Kandahar side, the sappers, under Captain Peat, were quietly piling their powder-bags against the Kabul Gate. The command of this party had, in fact, been offered by Thomson to his already distinguished subaltern, Henry Marion Durand; a tempting offer and—from a soldier of Thomson's quality—no small compliment. Yet it was declined. With characteristic magnanimity, Durand urged the superior claim of Peat, a senior and a Bombay engineer; asking only for himself the more perilous glory of placing the powder and firing the train. The soldierly request was granted, and the task carried through in gallant fashion—under a shower of stones, bricks and earth from the battlements above.

A column of smoke and flame; a dull reverberation and the crash of falling masonry—heard above the rushing wind and the roar of the guns—told Dennie's storming party that their own moment had come.

The bugles sounded the advance. Then, for a few bewildering moments, men and officers were paralyzed by a countermand to retreat, the error of an instant that might have ruined all.

But even as Keane—watching eagerly from the heights—despatched a flying aide-de-camp, the error was rectified. The advance pealed forth again more lustily than

ever. With cheer upon cheer, and the sharp crackle of musketry, four British regiments dashed forward, like hounds slipped from the leash. Followed a desperate hand-to-hand struggle in the narrow passage, bayonets against swords; then more prolonged cheers, more deafening volleys of musketry: and Sir John Keane drew a mighty breath of relief. The end had justified the means.

Ghazni had been carried, and that by one of the "most spirited, skilful and successful *coups de main* in the annals of British India." Mistakes, however flagrant, were washed out by the blood of five hundred Afghans; and in place of censure, Keane reaped rewards more justly due to three young engineer officers, who had saved his reputation and their country's honour at the hazard of their own lives.

The sun, looking over the eastern hills, revealed the Union Jack flapping and billowing in a brisk wind above the citadel of Ghazni, stronghold of Mahomedan dominion for more than a thousand years; and Afzul Khan, arriving with a large body of cavalry to annihilate the "beaten invader," knew, by that astounding sign, that the end had come indeed. Son of Dōst Mahomed though he was, his courage was not proof against the shock. Forsaking all impedimenta, he fled post-haste toward Kabul, to bid his father prepare for the worst.

But ill news, being winged, sped faster than he. Before sunset on the 23rd, Dōst Mahomed knew that Ghazni, the impregnable, had gone the way of Kandahar; knew that this irretrievable loss involved the capture of one son, the defection of another. The threefold blow went near to break his heart—but not his spirit. Prostrated for a moment, he rose up the more fiercely determined to hold his own at Kabul—or die in the attempt.

His opening moves were prompt and to the point.

"Bid the swiftest horseman in the camp," said he, "carry word to Mahomed Akbar, Light of my Eyes, that there is greater need for him and his men here than at the Kyber. Therefore let them come as wind before rain, staying not for food or drink by the way. Send others also to tell Afzul Khan—changeling and no true Barakzai—that the father he hath dishonoured will not speak with him. Let him come no nearer. He will not be received."

It was done; and within the hour he stood before his chiefs, a proud and gallant figure, for all the weight of trouble on his heart. He spoke frankly and not without bitterness of defection among the people; of his fear that even those whom he called friends and brothers might be tempted to desert a losing cause.

"Without the aid of a traitor could Ghazni have fallen in one night?" he demanded, clenching his hands upon the word as though that traitor's neck were fast between them. "Ghazni—citadel of Mahmud, All-Conqueror! It is not possible. Now listen, my brothers. If there be traitors here also, or cowards, wavering like corn in the breeze—let them depart, that I may at least have certain knowledge of the ground whereon I stand. Dōst Mahomed, brother of Futteh Khan, hath no need of men who desert the green standard in the day of battle."

But it appeared that none such were present. All protested fidelity; and in the council of war that followed it was decided that, before giving battle, the Nawab Jubbur Khan should be sent to treat with Shah Shujah and his foreign friends.

"Bid them consider, Brother of my Heart," urged the Amir at parting, "that I make no unjust demands. I will even admit the claim of the Saddozai (though he failed to hold his own) if they, in turn, will admit my hereditary claim to the office of Wazir."

Armed with this ultimatum the Nawab rode off escorted by half-a-dozen men; and in four days—albeit he was no longer young—he covered the ninety miles between Kabul and Ghazni. Mohun Lal, the persuasive, ambled forth to meet him; his old friend Sekundur Burnes greeted him at the piquets; and his tent was pitched beside Macnaghten's own. Smiles and smooth speech were his portion; but for all his earlier attachment to the English, the Nawab was in no pliable mood.

Confronted with the Royal Puppet, he demanded bluntly, "Why all this mighty *tamasha?* If *you* are to be king here, what use is this army of Feringhis? If they are to rule—which is most like—of what use are *you?* They have brought you hither with their money. Let them leave you now, to rule us—if you *can.*"

But Shah Shujah, elate with victory, could afford to ignore the implied sneer.

"That will be done," he made answer suavely, "when my kingdom shall be fully established, at which time the honourable Nawab Jubbur Khan shall surely enjoy confidential office close to the throne."

The Barakzai dismissed even royal blandishments with a dignity and decision that by no means decreased British predilection in his favour. He had come upon his brother's business; and without more ado he put forward, in plain terms, the Amir's demand. Just and natural as it was from one point of view, from the other, refusal was a foregone conclusion. With Dōst Mahomed for Wazir, Shah Shujah might as well remain at Ludhiāna as sit on the masnad while another ruled in his name.

None the less, refusal, coupled with the offer of "honourable asylum" in British India, roused Jubbur Khan from tacit hostility into open anger.

"Honourable asylum—*Bismillah!*" He flung the

phrase with scorn into Macnaghten's politely smiling face. "Even were our cause far more hopeless than it is, Dōst Mahomed Khan would sooner throw himself upon British bayonets than upon British protection. To the true Afghan freedom is life, be it never so hazardous. As for me, I follow the fortunes of my brother; and as for you, Shah Shujah and Macloten Sahib, that have refused his most reasonable demand—the God of Justice will require at your hands the lives of all the brave men who shall fall before this contest is at an end."

Had a flash of foreknowledge been vouchsafed them, it might well have given them pause. But their eyes being holden, they dismissed with affable contempt a foiled adversary's harangue; and next morning the Nawab rode forth from that city of tents with a heavy heart. For the first time in his life he had seen a British army encamped; and its appearance, its prevailing atmosphere of discipline, seemed silently to proclaim the hopelessness of armed resistance.

In vain one who rode at his elbow sought to cheer him with contemptuous comment: "*Wah! Wah!* Nawab Sahib. These Feringhis be no true fighters. Their army is made only of camels and canvas; ours of mounted warriors with sharp swords. What a degradation to be overcome by camels and canvas!"

But the Nawab, being gifted with discernment, could not rid himself of the secret fear that camels and canvas might have the last word after all.

On the 1st of August he reached Kabul and delivered his unpalatable news. Its precise effect upon his brother he could not accurately guess. For Afghanistan's most notable Amir was a man so compact of mighty opposites that it was hard to foresee the dominating mood of any given moment. At once just and unjust, merciful and

cruel, rash and cautious, frank and treacherous, it seemed almost as if two opposing spirits struggled within him for supremacy. In truth the finer elements were his by nature; the grosser ones fostered by a life of perpetual warfare, perpetual excitation of every evil impulse and passion that Afghan flesh is heir to. Compelled, again and again, to choose between sin and extinction, he sinned —boldly and flagrantly, as strong natures will. But pressure of circumstances apart, the real man leaned always toward the way of uprightness and courage. Under a serener sky and on less barren soil he might have risen to high rank as a ruler and a man; and never perhaps did his innate nobility shine more clearly forth than in this his penultimate hour of kingship.

Let the British army be never so imposing, he would go forth and make one stubborn stand against them in the valley of Maidán. For all their array of camels and canvas, these Feringhi-*log* had proven themselves, thus far, a people zealous to corrupt with money-bags and *jagirs*.[1] They had paid in gold mohurs for every hair in the beard of that prince among turn-coats—Hādji Khan. It yet remained to be seen whether they could bring into subjection by the sword. Ghazni had fallen to them through treachery; and, praise be to Allah, though his remnant of followers might be few, there were now no traitors in their midst.

The Nawab, though less assured, applauded his brother's spirit, and the order was given to move down to Arghandi *en route* for Maidán. But at Arghandi the tragic conviction was forced on Dōst Mahomed that his confidence had been misplaced. The venal Kazzilbashes were secretly slipping away to the winning side; and even among those that remained the poison of treachery was

[1] Grants of land.

fast leavening the whole lump. To lean upon them were as serviceable as to lean upon corn-stalks.

It was the counterpart, on a small scale, of Napoleon's desperate days at Fontainebleau; and although Dōst Mahomed, chief of Afghanistan, was infinitely the lesser man, he met this last unkindest stroke of fortune with no less of dignity and spirit than did the immortal Emperor whose name had terrorized Europe.

If others were false, he at least was true to his manhood. Taking the Koran in his hand, he rode through the ranks of his assembled troops; then, confronting them, he adjured them by the Sacred Book, and by all the names of God, not to disgrace their nation and dishonour their religion by rushing into the arms of one who had deluged the land with blaspheming infidels.

"You that are Afghans—you that are sons of the Prophet, stand firm and sway not in the hour of adversity!" His deep voice, for all its urgency of appeal, had yet the ring of authority. "Rally round the Commander of the Faithful like heroes and true believers. Beat back the invader of your country or die in the glorious attempt. What claim on your fidelity has this bringer of foreign bayonets and foreign money-bags compared with mine? Have you not eaten my salt this thirteen years? Have I not served those whom I also ruled?"

Pausing, he scanned the row after row of imperturbable faces before him, hoping against hope for some glimmer of response.

Then he spoke again on a deeper note of feeling. "*Inshallah*—it is the will of God. But if your hearts are set on seeking a new master, grant me at least one boon in return for years of maintenance and justice. Enable me to die with honour. Stand by the brother

of Futteh Khan in his first and last charge against the cavalry of these Feringhi dogs. In that desperate onset he will fall. Then go—go, every man of you, and make your own terms with Shah Shujah!"

Again silence fell—and endured. Only here and there came a muttered response to that spirit-stirring appeal.

Again the Amir looked desperately round upon those who called themselves his "followers," and, in the bitterness of his heart, disowned them once for all.

"Cowards and traitors as you are, the brother of Futteh Khan has no further need of you! Go. Lose no time. Purchase your own safety by a mockery of allegiance—and leave your true ruler to his fate. No man is strong enough to fight against Destiny. It is the will of God. *Rookshut*—you have leave to depart."

It was all they desired; and, again like the followers of Napoleon, they were graceless in their eagerness to be gone: many plundered him in going, even as Constant plundered the Emperor he had served more than fourteen years.

Yet, when it came to the final test, there remained of Dōst Mahomed's army some two thousand Afghan soldiers who could not find it in their hearts to desert so kingly a ruler, so brave a man, and to this staunch remnant were added the troops lately arrived under Akbar Khan. Escorted by these, and hampered by the Asiatic's inevitable crowd of relations and womenfolk, Dōst Mahomed set out for the valley of Bamián in the Hindu Kush, leaving Akbar, light of his eyes, with a handful of picked men to cover his retreat. From Bamián he would push on across the Afghan border and seek refuge in Bokhara—until the appointed day of retribution.

This was on the 2nd of August, and by that date the

British force was encamped within twenty-one miles of Arghandi, where they looked to win a signal victory and capture the man who had showed such scant appreciation of Macnaghten's generous offer. But upon the morning of the 3rd a party of Kazzilbash horsemen, eager to join the royal standard, announced the flight of the Amir.

Here was an unlooked-for complication demanding instant action. While Dōst Mahomed remained at liberty, the Shah could know neither security nor peace. But the Dōst had a clear start of fourteen hours, *plus* twenty-one miles. Pursuit were obviously vain; and the only alternative—an uncertain one at best—to cut across the mountains and intercept him at Bamián. It was a forlorn hope. Success hung upon time and speed. A picked force of two hundred and fifty cavalry was told off for the venture, and Captain James Outram—unsurpassed for intrepidity and zeal—volunteered to take the lead. Nine officers joined him, daring riders all, yet all defective in one great essential—knowledge of the country and the route.

At this crisis Shah Shujah proffered the services of Hādji Khan, Kākur, sometimes Governor at Bamián.

Supposing him trustworthy, here was the very man. But the complexion of the wily Kākur chief had suffered a suspicious change on entering the dominion of an armed and resolute Amir. He was ill, he said, and could not bear the bustle of a military camp. He fell back and kept always a few marches in the rear. Here he recovered his tone in the congenial society of other intriguing chiefs, who awaited only the first sign of a reverse to annihilate the infidels root and branch.

But when, instead of a reverse, came the fall of Ghazni, behold Hādji Khan, all loyalty and devotion, eager to congratulate his king, and claim merit for producing long-

delayed mails and dispatches that he himself had held back to utilize as opportunity should serve.

For this and other services he now reaped reward. Yet it was with very mixed feelings that he found himself, with a large body of Afghan horsemen, virtually in command of the pursuit. Dōst Mahomed, if not beloved, was widely respected and feared, as Shah Shujah never would be; nor had the traitor any stomach for a personal encounter with his late friend backed by a following of desperate men; an encounter that might well involve him in a blood feud with the inexorable Barakzais.

Wherefore, from the start, he proceeded tactfully, yet persistently, to put the curb on Outram's fiery impatience to be gone. The start that was to be at four o'clock he delayed till dusk; nor could he be persuaded to forsake the high road and dash straight across the hills. In this last decision he was wiser than he knew; for Akbar Khan, with a handful of men no less desperate than his father's, held the top of the nearest pass for more than twenty-four hours. Then, seeing no sign of keen pursuit, he rode quietly on down the slopes of the Hindu Kush, "having secured the retreat of a father whose loss of dominion and power he was destined fearfully to avenge."

But in the meantime all was gratulation and rejoicing. Confident in the Hādji's eagerness for preferment, the Shah hoped soon to see his enemy humbled in the dust; and now at least the grand military promenade—that had spent a clear nine months in promenading from Ferozepore to Kabul—could go forward without fear of further diversions by the way.

On the 6th of August the invading force encamped at Nannuchi, two and a half miles from the capital; and at three o'clock on the next afternoon every item of that

force—from the Shah, in jewelled coronet, coat and girdle, to the latest born camp followers—was drawn up in readiness for the royal progress to the Bala Hissar, the fortified palace wherein Shah Shujah had not set foot for thirty years.

He himself headed the procession; not, as usual, in his gilded litter, but mounted on a white Kabuli charger caparisoned in gold. On his breast, coronet and girdle blazed all the royal jewels save the Kohi-noor, that "Mountain of Light" wrested from him, like so much else, by the insatiable Ranjit Singh. Near him rode Burnes and the Envoy, resplendent in the diplomatic costume of the day, plumed hat and blue frock coats with collar, cuffs and epaulettes out-rivalling those of a field-marshal. Major-Generals, Brigadiers, and all the personal staff made an orgy of scarlet and gold; and last —though, in his own estimation, very far from least— the inimitable traitor-maker Munshi Molum Lal flaunted his gayest tunic, his most majestic turban, in honour of the day.

Enthusiasm, mainly due to a stirring sense of achievement, pervaded all ranks. But, once within the narrow, crowded streets of Kabul city, it became all too evident that neither enthusiasm, nor sense of achievement was shared by those for whose ostensible benefit all had been done and endured.

The spectacle, as a spectacle, drew the whole of Kabul. An ocean of turbaned heads surged in every street and upon every house-top. There was music also, and a deafening fire of small guns. Yet never a spontaneous shout or acclamation greeted the long-lost, very much forgotten king. The unbroken solemnity suggested a burial rather than a resurrection.

Whatever Shah Shujah's feelings may have been he

did not suffer them to disturb the mask-like vacancy of his face. Only when, at last, he found himself within the citadel-palace did the real man emerge from the mask. Dignity and reserve were flung to the winds. With childish eagerness he ran from room to room, deploring aloud the changes and the universal dilapidation; while a *cortége* of British officers chorused sympathy and assent, not without a touch of genuine emotion.

There they left him, restored by their own courage and persistence to an empire sadly shrunken since the days of Ahmed Shah—"a puppet King, an insult to his people and their chiefs."

But if there were any who dared to think these things, none dared to speak them—as yet. Exultation—blind, unquestioning exultation was the mood of the moment; and Macnaghten's gratification knew no bounds. In his eyes a great revolution had been completed; an ancient monarchy restored. So the second act of the Afghan drama culminated in a blaze of seemingly genuine success.

XVII

It took time for news of these great doings to reach the handful of British officers by now established at Herāt, and very much occupied with their own complicated problems, with schemes of benevolence that should confirm and extend those already started by Pottinger himself.

On the 25th of July they had enjoyed a minor triumphal entry on their own account. In full-dress uniforms, escorted by a detachment of Sepoys, they had ridden up to the Citadel through streets thronged with gazers, and had solemnly made their obeisance to Shah Kamrān. By way of gracious acknowledgment a dinner of some fifty Afghan dishes had been laid in their honour upon the mud floor of an empty room, where they were joined by Yar Mahomed, in his silkiest mood, and eight or ten Sirdars of Herāt.

To their dismay they discovered that etiquette forbade them to sit cross-legged at meat, that instead they must contrive to kneel before their leaf platters in skin-tight overalls, sitting upon their heels. Now the heels of the Afghans were bare and their muscles inured to every form of genuflexion. But the heels of the British officers were adorned with spurs: a trivial detail that could no way modify a law of the Medes and Persians order. So, with the best possible grace, they addressed themselves to the problem in hand, and for half-an-hour or more, presented the undignified spectacle of eight tightly buttoned up Englishmen, hampered with swords and cocked hats,

vainly trying to manipulate a pillau after the manner of Abraham: now lunging awkwardly forward, now chasing rebellious fragments from havens where they should not be; and all the while discoursing affably upon affairs of state.

Ludicrous or no, they won through their ordeal creditably enough, for man *is* man and master of his fate, even when that fate condemns him to eat curry and rice with his fingers. But the courteous, immovable gravity of their hosts—who had never beheld a like *tamasha*—was altogether beyond them. Let one man only catch the eye of another, and "high politics" were gracelessly interrupted by stifled explosions of laughter, which like other Feringhi peculiarities the Afghans politely ignored.

Not until the meal was over, and eight sorely tried officers sank upon their several cushions, with unfeigned relief, did the flicker of a smile invade the gravity of Yar Mahomed's eyes.

Then said D'Arcy Todd, smiling frankly back at him: "You doubtless perceived the cause of our amusement, Sirdar Sahib? Our heels are not quite so well adapted for sitting upon as your own."

"*Wah! Wah!* So I had reason to fear," the Afghan made answer affably. "Indeed, if your Honour will not take it amiss, all those cocked hats and feathers stooping over the dishes put me in mind the whole time of hungry fowls picking up grain!"

Far from taking it amiss, the simile was greeted with a shout of laughter, that scattered formalities to the winds: and the new-comers, riding back through the city, voted Yar Mahomed quite a good fellow in his way; a far less formidable monster than Pottinger would have them believe. Even so does the spider beguile the fly that flutters into her web. At least it seemed a

propitious beginning; and mercifully the end was hidden from their eyes.

John Login had spent the evening in Pottinger's quarters; where indeed he spent much of his time during the next few weeks, discussing reforms and philanthropic enterprises dear to their hearts. The one an Orkney-man, the other an Ulsterman—the blood of Scandinavian ancestors ran in the veins of both; and both shared many fine elements of that heroic race. These—recognized by each in the other rather than in himself—conspired with mutual zeal for all that were desolate and oppressed to establish a very real friendship between them from the first. In truth the irresistible magnetism of Login, and the sympathetic understanding of Todd had so far healed the hurt inflicted by Macnaghten, that Pottinger had changed his mind about relinquishing a post peculiarly his own. But this second hot weather, following on the severe privations of the past year, had so damaged his health that change and rest from the strain of responsibility seemed imperative—for a time.

On this understanding, he and Todd decided to exchange duties; Todd to remain and act for him, while he carried the Treaty of Alliance to Kabul and there applied for a year's leave home. This arrangement greatly eased his mind, as also did the unaccustomed presence of other Englishmen, eager to share the labours and responsibilities that had too long been crowded upon one very broad pair of shoulders.

At first, indeed, the change, however welcome, had proved something of a strain. Two years of living more or less as an Afghan among Afghans, culminating in nine months without sight or speech of a European, had inevitably left their mark; though beneath his Eastern turban and *choga* he remained, in all respects,

British to the core; the more so, perhaps, because only by keeping tenacious inward hold upon the things that are true and lovely and of good report could he avoid the risk of slipping insensibly to the lower moral plane of those around him. For on man—that mysterious compound of desires and convictions—environment acts in directly opposite ways. To its insidious influence, the finer chameleon temperament or the grosser nature, unhampered by principle, responds instinctively by conscious or unconscious adaptation: while the man of principle or of marked personality no less instinctively keeps the balance, as it were, by leaning in an opposite direction.

So it was with Eldred Pottinger. For two years he had lived and breathed in an atmosphere poisonously befogged with evil. Yet, like the boy with bull's eye buttoned under his coat, he had kept alight the hidden lamp of the spirit. The outer man had conformed: the inner man had held resolutely aloof. Thus his reserve and his natural gift of silence had grown by the loneliness they fed on: and upon first acquaintance he must have been voted a dull companion by a party of young Englishmen, eager, interested and overflowing with the engaging *cameraderie* of the soldier. Bearded and turbaned, the grave thoughtfulness of his eyes deepened by over-intimate knowledge of evil and pain, it was difficult to believe him not yet eight and twenty; two years younger than Login, three years younger than Todd. And he, too, may well have felt himself older in every way, than those who came to reap where he had sown.

Thus at first he seemed to stand aloof even from them, from their optimistic half-knowledge, their projects and schemes. But it did not take him long to perceive the sterling qualities and sincerity of purpose underlying their

youth and lightness of heart; and aloofness soon gave place to readier comradeship on his side, increasing respect on theirs.

As for John Login, his ardour, fine temper and unconquerable cheerfulness soon won the heart of Eldred Pottinger, even as they had captivated his companions on the march. For here was a man of commanding personality, wholesome, invigorating and steeped in the sovereign quality of sympathy. A face of Napoleonic breadth and power was crowned by a noble expanse of brow and lighted by eyes that had seemed to have caught the gleam and colour of the sea he loved and would fain have served. Disapproving parents decreed that instead he should serve the maimed, the halt and the blind; and India—stepmother of many heroes—was enriched by one hero the more.

In Pottinger, Login was quick to recognize a philanthropic fervour that matched his own; though all that he had actually done and planned for the poor of Herāt was as hard to come at as his personal share in the defence of the city. To this peculiarity Login himself afterwards paid a tribute worth recording.

> "Pottinger," he wrote, "was as remarkable for his candour in making known his mistakes as for his modesty in alluding to his services. Although he had faithfully reported to Government that he had kicked Yar Mahomed's brother out of his house, for giving him the lie (which led Lord Auckland to declare him unfit to be our representative in Herāt), he had said nothing at all of his conduct in driving back the Persians at the last assault, when the city was almost in their hands. It was only after the Mission under D'Arcy Todd had arrived and Pot-

> tinger had left the place, that his boldness and gallantry became fully known, and his successor had the duty—which to his generous spirit was a most pleasing one—of reporting his heroic deeds to Government. Pottinger was one of those men who do not shine on paper, and who should never be asked to give a reason for their acts."

In adding this last Login may have had in mind the dictum that "true heroism feels and never reasons; and therefore is always right." But Governments are slow to recognize heroism; and "reasons in writing" are their peculiar perquisites, which they can rarely afford to forego.

When joining Todd's mission, Login had been given the option of remaining at Herāt or returning to Kabul with the bearer of the treaty; for his services were always in demand. But he had not been a week in the place before he decided to stay. He loved a maximum of work as most men love a maximum of leisure.

The poor of the city were to be his special charge, and his enthusiasm caught fire at the prospect of carrying on a work so nobly begun.

This decision brought him into closer touch with Pottinger, whose tongue could be more readily unloosed on the subject of education for the forty orphans he had rescued from slavery, and kept under his personal care; or alleviations for the hapless two thousand, who still flocked to him in the market-place for their one meal a day. So it came about that the two spent many evenings together in Pottinger's room, discussing the details of schemes new and old; building visionary hospitals, dispensaries, bungalows, which, in due time, took on form and substance, and remained as legacies of high

endeavour long after that endeavour had been brought to naught.

On the particular evening in question, Pottinger had sat silent a long while, absorbed in a modest-looking native book handed to him by Login, with smiling elation, half-an-hour before. The characters were Persian, the language Pushtu; the matter nothing less than the Christian Gospels and Epistles, on which Pottinger himself had been expending all his spare time and strength for the past few months.

Login—who included visions of conversion in his comprehensive programme—sat opposite, scanning his new friend's manuscript with intermittent murmurs of approval. Sprucely clad, and clean-shaven, but for a small moustache, his appearance accentuated Pottinger's Eastern aspect, which he could not alter if he would. For the political uniform, mufti and books sent up with the army had been unceremoniously dropped by the way.

Of a sudden both men looked up. Their eyes met in mutual understanding and Pottinger closed his book.

"I'm glad you brought this, Login," said he. "It ought to do much good. Even if it fails to convince them, merely reading that incomparable story must have some refining and ennobling influence on those who are less incorrigible than Yar Mahomed and his crew. At least that was the idea that tempted me to try my hand at some sort of translation, however rough. You will find my friends the Syuds very open-minded. They have been genuinely interested even in my stuff. But this is a vast deal better. A pity I wasted my time——"

"My dear sir, you did nothing of the kind."

"Well, no, I believe you're right," Pottinger admitted, smiling. "It's true the work helped to keep me going when things looked blacker than usual. And if Herāt has

no need of my lame version, at least it will please my mother."

"And *that's* a good enough excuse for its existence! Mine would be a proud woman if I'd achieved as much—to say nothing of all the rest! I was reading St. Paul, in Persian, with the old Chief Rabbi this morning; and he told me, with tears in his eyes, that but for you they would have cut down his synagogue for fuel after the siege. They're fine fellows—some of these Asiatic Jews; and they seemed quite impressed with my carpet-making scheme."

Pottinger's grave face lit up and his tone caught something of the other's eagerness.

"I should think so indeed! It's a splendid plan. I was a fool not to think of it months ago. But I hope I may see it in something like working order before I leave."

"That you shall; if between us we can convince these money-grabbing Afghans of the practical advantage to themselves. I don't mean to let grass grow under my feet: and I have the advantage of being able to devote all my time and energy to the one problem, while you——"

"I—oh, *I've* been Jack of all trades and master of none——"

There was no bitterness but more than a shade of weariness in Pottinger's tone: and Login leaning forward laid a hand upon his arm.

"Tell that to the others, Pottinger; I know better. I'm thinking it will take time for us to discover all you have mastered in these two years. How about Yar Mahomed Khan?"

Pottinger smiled and shook his head. "My dear Login, no Englishman with a rudiment of a conscience will ever master that devil in man's clothing."

"Is that so, indeed? Bhuggāt Rām is beginning to cherish hopes——"

"Bhuggāt Rām——? Oh—you mean Todd. Perhaps it's as well. I cherished them once! They don't thrive well in the soil of Herāt. But his *kismet* may be better than mine; and he will bask in the Envoy's favour, which is always sustaining! But we are deserting your carpet plan? Have you made good progress lately?"

Yes; Login, being the man he was, had moved a mountain or so with a thrust of his broad shoulders: and for an hour or more the two sat over Pottinger's rickety writing table hammering out fresh details of a scheme to revive the making of carpets, which had long since been the glory of Herāt. In this her day of ruin and stagnation, there remained no more than two or three old men who knew anything at all of the once famous industry. But that was enough for John Login. He brought his magnetism to bear on those aged Herātis; and before long, by sheer persistence, had breathed life into a dead industry that would provide occupation for hundreds of idle hands: a far more important consideration in his eyes than merely replenishing the coffers of Herāt. Pottinger had started agricultural relief works for men and boys, and had set the lame and blind to grinding corn; but Login hoped to employ in his new industry many of the two thousand supported by his forerunner since the siege. Women and old men, unfit for heavier work, could very well be utilized for spinning, sorting and carding the necessary cotton and wool. The work might be coarse at first, but it would improve; as indeed it did, with such astonishing rapidity that within a year Login's Herāti carpets vied with the best that Persia could produce.

It was at this time that Pottinger decided on taking

six of his orphan boys to India for medical training. The rest he could confidently leave to the care of Login and Todd. One of them was already Login's devoted slave; following him everywhere, a silent, adoring shadow; and sleeping like a dog outside his door; till the Hakeem Sahib—whom all deemed a wizard—raised him to the dignity of service, and the cup of his content was full.

Throughout August's rainless heat the houses and streets of Hérāt were well-nigh unbearable. But the officers of the Mission—absorbed in new interests and new work—abated their activity no whit. Though none might surpass Login for energy and zeal, each in his own sphere was equally well employed: Saunders on the fortifications; the subalterns drilling and organizing Kamrān's remnant of an army; D'Arcy Todd involved in a maze of problems, whereof was none more insoluble than Yar Mahomed Khan.

In her first experience of the British officer at close quarters Herāt was blest indeed. Arthur Conolly—most lovable and incorrigible of idealists—had led the way, and lifted expectation high. Followed Eldred Pottinger, less ardent and imaginative, yet a man of supreme courage and resolution; neither smoking nor drinking, and of such consistent self-restraint in private as in public life that Mahomedans deemed him a Syud of exceptional holiness. And now, behold, eight other Englishmen of like countenance; men who added to ability and enthusiasm, a moral motive power forged by the strong religious convictions of their day; who, without any temple, met together for worship; and by their blameless lives, in the midst of debauchery, set a living example of the faith that was in them; an example worth more than a library of sermons.

As for the Herāti Afghans, denounced by Login as "a very drunken lot," they marvelled, from first to last, at the folly of men who abjured the convivial joys of intoxication, and that although wine was not forbidden by their religion.

In addition to this, and other peculiarities, the fact that all were bachelors bewildered a folk who reckoned marriage not merely a personal necessity, but a man's first duty to his nation, race or clan.

James Abbott has told how his Afghan servant spoke openly of the general amazement, adding: "Not all our mysteries of steam, bare heads, coat tails, cock's feathers and unveiled women, so bewildered and impressed the fancy of Mahomedans as that an article made in pairs should, among Feringhis, be constantly found separated; like disunited legs of compasses, or a gross of boots for the right foot! It is vain to argue the point, to talk of wandering comets: for in their eyes it seems so simple to take a wife at each important place."

But Pottinger and his successors strangely ignored this practical view of the matter. Less zealous than Burnes to do in Rome as the Romans did, none among them found it necessary to increase his knowledge of Eastern ways and wiles by establishing a harem, or taking to himself a wife from among the "children of Ammon." Pottinger's ascetic fashion of life had been excused on the ground that he was Syud and a friend of Syuds. But these others also!—*Wah! Wah!* It was incredible! None the less, incredible or no, the fact remained: and what is more, the impression of British character thereby established endured long after missions and treaties and visions of political expansion had melted into the air.

Unhappily at Kandahar and Kabul it was otherwise. Login himself has said that if the first European officers

established in those cities had shown the same high sense of their responsibilities as Christian gentlemen, the same anxiety not to compromise the dignity and character of their countrymen in the eyes of hostile Mahomedans, "we might, humanly speaking, have been spared a very humiliating chapter in the history of Afghanistan." And in all they did, as in all they were, that devoted self-sacrificing band of soldiers commanded admiration and respect, even from the Afghans who stood amazed at their mania for gratuitous exertion; while the people themselves "marvelled that strangers to them in faith should lavish lakhs of rupees and all their energies to alleviate the sufferings of wretched beings who could never even hope to be useful citizens."

One man alone among them all execrated that which excited wonder in the rest. He saw, in their enthusiastic benevolence, merely a veiled plot to render him more than ever abhorrent to the people he ground under his heel. But for the moment it suited him to give these madmen their head; while he stood aside, watchful, complacent—biding his time.

So thought Pottinger, who alone knew the man; and did not envy Todd the coming political duel whereof he could foresee almost every move. But to say too much in the way of warning were merely to seem the "croaker" Macnaghten already believed him; and he wisely contented himself with emphasizing afresh two points that in his opinion were of supreme importance.

"Remember this, Todd," said he at parting, "if you want to avoid a repetition of the horrors we have but just pulled through, you *must* insist on appointing one of our own officers to superintend the cultivating and storing of grain for famine relief; and be sure you keep up my new plan of paying all moneys *direct* from the

British treasury to those concerned. If you do that, you may hold on here. If not—well, I wouldn't give much for your chance of success. You can take my word for it, there are only two courses open to us in this place. Either we must decisively assert our power, or take ourselves off and leave the two monsters here to misgovern as they please."

But neither Todd nor Macnaghten were disposed to insist on measures likely to prove unpopular. Conciliation was the catchword of the moment, and the advice of the one man who could speak from intimate knowledge was disregarded—with the inevitable result.

Months after, when the costliness and impracticability of Macnaghten's Herāt policy had been proven up to the hilt, John Login wrote to a friend: "Yar Mahomed was quite right in supposing that the influence of the English at Herāt would have become far too deep-rooted to suit his taste. . . . Yet I have little doubt that had the arrangement made by Eldred Pottinger been continued—of making payment direct from the British Treasury instead of through the Wazir—we might have held Herāt throughout all the subsequent reverses in Afghanistan." "Ifs" and "buts" are kittle-kattle. Change one least factor in past events, and no man living can gauge the result. Yet in this case there is good reason to believe that John Login spoke truth.

For him, more than for any of the others, Pottinger's departure would be a loss indeed. But all had been set in working order; the high-sounding treaty of conciliation ratified; and there remained no further reason for delay.

On September the 1st—in accordance with native custom—the travellers spent their last night encamped without the walls: Ritchie and Pottinger, with his six

orphan boys, and his old friend Hakeem Mahomed Hussain, lately returned to the city; their safe transit ensured by a guide and Todd's former escort of twenty horse, added to Pottinger's Herātis under Allah Dad Khan.

On the 10th—owing to unexpected delays—they set out for Kabul, by way of the Hazara highlands and the Valley of Bamián: Pottinger severely pulled down in health, yet upheld in spirit by the knowledge that he had, at all events, done his duty to the utmost, regardless of personal results.

Within a year he would return, please God, created anew by the long sea voyage, and by sights and sounds of home. Yet—turning as he rode away, for a farewell look at the white-walled, many-towered city of his baptism in suffering, action, fame—he wondered in his heart whether he would ever set eyes on it again; whether D'Arcy Todd, armed with more of enthusiasm than knowledge, would hold his own against the Napoleon of Central Asia for the space of a year.

XVIII

THAT march to Kabul—leisurely, uneventful and infinitely welcome to a devout lover of the road—lasted near two months; two months of blessed respite from official correspondence, from political friction and responsibility. So far as he could judge, the outlook seemed promising enough. At Kabul, Shah Shujah sat in state on the throne of his "very few ancestors," while his noble allies rejoiced greatly after the peculiar fashion of their race. At Herāt he had left a devoted band of men who—if success were commensurate with effort—could scarcely fail of achievement. Yet, in that brief two months both Macnaghten and Todd made more than a few discoveries sufficiently disconcerting to men whose belief in the Great Game stood only second to their belief in God.

Macnaghten had looked that D'Arcy Todd's report should justify his assertion to Lord Auckland that British influence could only be established at Herāt by "gaining the confidence of the Wazir and his co-operation in the removal of existing abuses."

But before October was out, Todd, the hopeful and zealous, found himself constrained to echo the conviction of Pottinger—the supposed croaker and alarmist, that "a friendly footing here seems quite impossible, and it appears to me the only alternative is to attack or be attacked."

Nor was his opinion of Yar Mahomed—now our ally by treaty—more encouraging than that already received.

"The fact seems," he wrote, "that honest and open policy can be neither appreciated nor understood by those . . . who believe that open dealing is the smooth surface which conceals a more dangerous design. That we should win by bounty what we can take by force seems to them absurd. Benefits, therefore, only weaken decision. . . . Since beginning this letter I have been favoured with a visit from the Wazir, attended by sixty armed men; ostensibly applicants for bounty, but really guards in case of treachery. He made new and large demands on the Mission Treasury, doubtless with a view to ascertaining how far my suspicions were roused and incensing against us those whose claims we might deny. I put him off with fair words. . . . and said I had heard of the arrival of our treaty of friendship at Kandahar; adding, that I soon expected to hear it had been printed and dispersed throughout the world.

"This appeared to startle him. 'What,' said he, 'do you always *print* your treaties?' 'Yes,' I repeated. 'We can afford to do so, for we never break them.' They refused to drink our tea, perhaps fearing poison; and the chief Eunuch seemed so alarmed at the turn of the conversation that he abruptly broke up the party and they took their leave."

So much for the wisdom of blackening the British name in Central Asia by overtures to a miscreant like Yar Mahomed Khan.

Happily for Macnaghten this cheering communication, though written in October, did not reach him till November, for he was beset with uncongenial discoveries nearer

home. Even in the very month of his triumphal entry he found himself confronted by three outstanding facts, calculated to test optimism even of the blindest: Dōst Mahomed had escaped; the Shah was openly disappointed and ill-content with his shrunken kingdom; while his "popularity" stood, self proven, a fiction which must either be laboriously kept up, or acknowledged at the cost of exposing the false foundation beneath the whole imposing house of cards.

The proverbial immunity of the "unjust" was not to be long enjoyed by William Macnaghten. Within a week of his arrival Outram's daring and battered little party returned to Kabul *minus* the Amir, and were greeted with the inevitable touch of condescension that is the portion of unsuccess. Friends bade them be thankful they had returned intact from their crazy wild-goose chase, and Sir John Keane—critically eyeing thirteen of his boldest and most efficient officers—remarked with conviction: "By Gad! I didn't suppose there were thirteen such asses in the whole of my force!"

But for Macnaghten the matter was far too serious to be dismissed with pleasantries. The tale Outram had to tell proved that once more Hādji Khan had been true to his reputation: that treachery, not failure, had sent the pursuers back empty handed, after a week of severe fatigue and exposure cheerfully endured by officers and men; a week of incessant clash between the eagerness of Outram and the wiles of the Afghan chief. His excuses had been varied and endless. But when at length he found Outram proof against privations, fatigue and artifice, he had thrown off his mask and declared that his Afghans were not to be relied on if pitted against Dōst Mahomed's men. By this time they had reached Bamián, only to find that the Amir was thirty miles off and beyond

the Afghan border, which Outram had orders not to cross.

The game was up, and the Hādji triumphed; but not for long. He was arrested by order of an infuriated King. Other proofs of treason were readily found, and the prince of turncoats was condemned to end his days as a state prisoner in Hindostan.

It was reported that in one of his many altercations with Outram he had said: "I am hated now by Afghans for my friendship with the English. *Next to the King*, I am the most unpopular man in the country." A saying long remembered against him, though for once in his life—if never before or since—he had spoken the simple truth. The "adoration" discovered by Macnaghten at Kandahar was elsewhere conspicuously absent. Worse than all, the King himself evinced little of gratitude to his benefactors, and less of satisfaction with the mutilated remnant of an empire that had once extended from Balkh to Shikarpore, from Herāt to Kashmir.

Sitting apathetically day after day at the window of his high citadel, looking out upon the domes and flat mud roofs of Kabul, upon the once familiar expanse of orchard, lake and barren mountain, no thrill of elation stirred within him. A tired, disillusioned old man of seventy, he suffered the common experience of all who return in age to scenes loved in their youth. City and palace, lake and valley—seen for thirty years through the magnifying lens of memory—seemed unaccountably small and mean; scarce worth the pains he had been at to regain them, or the irksome burden of indebtedness to those masterful, ubiquitous Feringhis, who had generously endowed him with the semblance of power, while reserving the substance for themselves. Forgetful, too soon, of exiled years, of hardships and successive defeats, he

resented their conspicuous share in his restoration and the still more conspicuous part they seemed like to play in reorganizing his kingdom.

But the man's courage was of doubtful hue; and if he mistrusted the Feringhis, his mistrust of the Afghans went deeper still. He had enough of shrewdness to perceive that it was one thing to sit enthroned in the Bala Hissar, and very much another to control a mercenary, quarrelsome and restless people, for whom he had little love in his heart, and in whose eyes his dependence on infidels had greatly humiliated him. So he, like Macnaghten, found himself between two fires: doubtful of all about him, yet more profoundly doubtful of himself.

To both it was plain that the moment had arrived for redeeming Lord Auckland's promise, contained in the Simla manifesto, wherein his lordship had "confidently hoped" that the Shah would be "speedily replaced on his throne by his own subjects and adherents"; to which hope had been added the assurance that "when once he shall be secured in power, and the independence and integrity of Afghanistan established, the British army shall be withdrawn." But a promise so vaguely worded and qualified left many loopholes of escape, should fulfilment prove distasteful or impolitic. In the first place Shah Shujah had not been enthroned by his subjects and adherents, but by British money and arms. In the second place, the mere fact that both he and Macnaghten doubted his ability to hold his own, without British support, was a scathing commentary on that disingenuous proclamation, which had set the entire project in train.

It was a time of painful uncertainty and indecision; a time fraught with big issues for all concerned. Throughout those last weeks of August '39 the honour of England, the prestige of British arms and the fate of

countless brave men hung trembling in the balance. But though Macnaghten might cherish secret misgivings, and the Shah secret distrust, on the surface all was gaiety and reaction after nine months of strenuous effort and endurance.

Officially gilded, the net result seemed all that could be desired. It was given out that a series of masterly operations had been crowned with uniform success; that Russia had been rebuked; Persia overawed; Dōst Mahomed's power broken for good; that the Shah restored, "by the blessing of God," to an undisputed throne, held the keys of India in his hand.

By September, news of Kandahar "adoration," and of Ghazni, reached England, where Whig enthusiasm ran high. Sir John Hobhouse proudly declared himself the father of the war, and extolled Lord Auckland as a man of extraordinary qualities—"the ablest Governor-General India had seen for a long time." Approval resulted in the usual crop of honours, bestowed with more than the usual lack of discernment. Auckland became an earl, Keane a peer, Macnaghten a baronet. Only the Iron Duke in his wisdom bade them remember the lesson of Moscow, and prophesied that where their military successes ended, their real troubles would begin.

At Kabul the prevailing spirit of jubilation found expression in reviews, races, entertainments, and finally in a grand Durbar, whereat Shah Shujah—aping the custom of western kings—distributed broadcast a newly-invented Durāni order commemorating,—in Durand's trenchant phrase,—"the recovery of his lost throne in a manner discreditable to himself and dishonouring to his people."

As for the British officers and men, happy in the belief that they would soon leave Afghanistan for good, they amused themselves to the top of their bent: riding races,

buying mementoes of a unique experience, exploring with eager interest convivialities of the living, relics of the dead.

Of the first there was no lack in a city whose men were noted for hospitality, and her women for their beauty and love of intrigue. Afghans in general are consumedly jealous for the honour of their wives. Yet it would appear that the ill repute of Kabul was mainly founded on fact, and that her women were not seriously libelled by the well-known saying: "The flour of Kabul is not without lime, nor the woman of Kabul without a paramour." Certain it is that even among better class Afghans, so long as purdah was strictly kept, she enjoyed an amount of individual freedom rare in the East. All things considered, it is not surprising if at times she made ill use of it, and the *boorkha*, like charity, cloaked a multitude of sins. Beneath its shapeless folds lurked the eternal siren, in gaily coloured tunic and wide trousers, hair elaborately plaited and plastered, ears outlined with silver rings, eyelids heavy with antimony, cheeks adorned with rouge and tinsel patches of gold or silver cunningly set—the immemorial instigator of blood feuds and disturber of household peace.

But socially, as elsewhere in India, she seemed almost non-existent. At an Afghan *soirée*, attended—out of sheer curiosity—by Outram and three friends, she was represented only by the inevitable nautch girl and two ancient Sybils who supported her in song and dance. Their host was none other than Abdul Reshed, who, at Molum Lal's instigation, had sold Ghazni and his uncle the Amir for five hundred rupees. To this not very creditable service he owed the privilege of entertaining British officers, who were rather amused than impressed by their first introduction to the "town house" of a Barakzai lord.

A rough wooden door, a narrow passage black as the pit; an open courtyard roofed with stars, and furnished with refuse heaps and tethered horses; a staircase, narrow as the passage, with never a *chirāg* to reveal murderous roof-beams to the drunken or the unwary; an empty balcony, and beyond, at last, the inner room, dimly lit, filled with bearded men. Here they were greeted with the prescribed chorus of kind inquiries: "*Jor-asti?*[1] *Khush-asti?*[2] *Salaam aleikum:*"[3] and here, lolling on cushions, they were served with fruits and pillau, with the pungent Kabul spirit twice the strength of gin. Finally a *hookah* was passed, without prejudice, from mouth to mouth, not excluding the hired band, whose inhuman energy and weird minor discords precluded all necessity for making conversation.

Followed the nautch girl and her attendant crone, probably the first seen in Kabul since the fall of Dōst Mahomed Khan. For that despised barbarian had, of late years, rivalled Cromwell himself in the enforcement of rigid morality upon his people. The professional dancer had been abolished; the production of alcohol put down by law. Now, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, all was changed. With the advent of a Christian army the trade in spirits soon became the most profitable in the town; while the prompt revival of the nautch girl re-asserted once more the futility of attempting to lift human character by legislation; of enforcing from without that which can only be permanently wrought from within.

Thus did the frank sociability of the Afghans, and their zest for manly sports, effectually blind officers and men to the devils of cruelty and cunning that lurked

[1] Are you strong? [2] Are you happy?
[3] Peace be with you.

within. They were unanimously voted excellent fellows, and mutual satisfaction was the mood of the moment.

None the less, before the middle of September all were impatient for the expected order to return. Life at Kabul, though an amusing novelty, soon proved too costly to suit the proverbially lean purse of the British officer. In a country where wine sold at three hundred rupees a dozen and cigars at a rupee apiece, he had no desire to establish a continuing city; and the Bombay troops under Willshire received with joy the command to march on September the 18th, *via* Kandahar and Sindh, calling at Khelāt by the way to punish Mehrab Khan. This addition to their programme proved conclusively that Keane had no intention of forgetting the ill impression made on him in his last interview with Major-General Nott. Cheated of Ghazni, the old Company's officer was now to be cheated also of his one remaining chance of distinction—the capture of Khelāt. It mattered nothing to Keane that, as early as July, Nott had received political communications leading him to expect that this duty would be entrusted to himself, and had not merely collected important information, but had caused the fortress to be secretly measured; while Willshire knew no more of the place than Keane had known of Ghazni when he left Kandahar. In Nott's eyes it was all of a piece with the rest. Just or unjust, he had felt convinced that the laurels would be reserved for a "Queen's General," and it was so. With a heart over-full of bitterness he pigeon-holed his information and grimly awaited the result.

On September the 18th the Bombay troops left Kabul, and those who wished them God-speed looked eagerly for their own order of release. They had done their duty. Shah Shujah's kingdom was established. On the surface

there appeared no reason for hesitation or delay. But below the surface lay the discreditable truth that the whole fair-seeming fabrication could not be trusted to remain intact if the scaffolding were removed; and the longer Macnaghten looked at the quandary he had so zealously prepared for himself, the more he shirked the only honest course of action. His faith in Shah Shujah's popularity, though shaken, was not extinct; yet he dared not risk leaving too soon the King, who was no King, lest Mehrab Khan's prophecy be fulfilled and the Government of India overwhelmed with disgrace. Like many men who have risen in a graded service, and breathed too long the relaxing air of officialdom, he feared responsibility. But his position, as supreme representative of Great Britain and Central Asia, was unique; and for the first time in his life he had tasted the intoxicating wine of power, that has unsteadied stronger men than he. His real, if unadmitted, desire was to remain: and with mortals of average morality, neither conscience, nor judgment, but the secret desire of the heart is the ruling factor in the day of decision.

And where desire is, there will pretexts be gathered together. Of these there were plenty to hand, though the obvious objections against military occupation outweighed them in the scale. Ranjit Singh was dead, and India—threatened with serious disturbance in the Punjab—could afford neither money nor troops to garrison a country like Afghanistan. On the other hand Pottinger had reported rumours of a large Russian force preparing to move on Khiva, and Shah Shujah did not conceal his fear that Dōst Mahomed, backed by Akbar Khan and the implacable Ghilzais, would seize the first opportunity of dislodging him from the throne.

Instantly Macnaghten's vivid imagination pictured a

Russian army on the banks of the Oxus; and, in spite of Keane's tacit disapproval, he decided on pushing a small force at once across the Hindu Khush, with the misty idea of liberating Stoddart, pursuing Dōst Mahomed, and forestalling Russian battalions, after wintering in the valley of Bamián. The fact that two stupendous passes, blocked for at least six months, lay between Bamián and Kabul, dismayed him no whit. The order was given. A detachment of Ghurkhas and gunners took a month surmounting the difficulties of the route "in order, after much toil and labour, to lodge an excellent battery of horse artillery where it could not be of any use."

In the mean time Dr. Lord—a political over-eager for any aggressive move—was sent after them, with an Afghan escort, to superintend the valiant undertaking. But in less than a week he was back again, open-mouthed, harassing Macnaghten's nerves with a startling tale of the Dōst, established at Kunduz and reinforced by the whole country west of the Hindu Khush; of open rebellion only forty miles from Kabul, and all Turkistan pouring forward to help the Amir recover his throne.

For a man in search of pretexts here was treasure-trove indeed! Lord Keane was promptly informed that no mere brigade, but the first division of the Bengal army must remain in Afghanistan.

His lordship, grown sceptical by now of the Envoy's alarms, replied indifferently that Macnaghten was welcome to any troops needed by the King, so long as he himself could get quit of the country without further delay.

Macnaghten, thankful to be relieved of indecision, wrote a long "official" to Lord Auckland explaining and justifying his change of plans—when lo, it transpired that the formidable rising was no more than a fairy-tale

invented by an escort unwilling to cross the Hindu Khush; that these were openly retailing their successful ruse as an excellent joke, seasoned with unflattering comments on the Hakeem Sahib's prompt retreat.

"*Inshallah!* Great was our *kismet!*" said they, "for, although it is the nature of Shah Shujah to run, we had not supposed that an *Inglesi* officer Sahib could be made to run so readily, or so fast!"

To be convicted of having swallowed whole a palpably improbable scare was not a little humiliating for both Englishmen; though in Macnaghten's case there was compensation. The fairy-tale had served its turn. He had committed himself to Keane and Lord Auckland, and had no mind to draw back. On so paltry a chance did the whole disastrous business turn.

But as yet the Envoy saw only—the throne safeguarded and his own secret wish fulfilled.

"Instead of keeping clearly in sight the primal interests of his Government," wrote Sir Henry Durand when all was over, "in lieu of seizing the favourable moment for disembarrassing it from a position every one saw to be faulty, he allowed minor motives, present importunities and phantasms of a remote danger to warp his judgment from a perception of his country's real honour and advantage, and by so doing tarnished the one, compromised the other, and wrapped the close of Lord Auckland's Indian career in consternation and gloom."

XIX

But it was one thing to decide on military occupation in force, and quite another to find suitable accommodation for officers and men, stores, ammunition and horses—the endless *impedimenta* of soldier life. General orders of October the 9th decreed that the division be broken up into detachments that should garrison the four chief cities—Kabul, Ghazni, Jalālabad and Kandahar; assigning to Kabul the 13th Light Infantry and 35th Native Infantry, with a light field battery and the Shah's troops under Brigadier Roberts, father of the present earl. For these, suitable cover must be found or prepared before the terrible Kabul winter set in, since no actual cantonment could possibly be built until the following spring. But Macnaghten, very much occupied with state festivities and formalities, seemed inclined to evade this fresh problem, though pressed by Henry Durand, the engineer in charge, for leave to strengthen the Bala Hissar and put up temporary quarters within its walls.

Set upon a height overlooking Kabul, this citadel within a citadel was the one point of strength in a singularly defenceless town, wedged between one of the Pughman Hills and an outlier of the Hindu Khush. At the roots of the most easterly hill, the Bala Hissar reared battlemented walls, woefully out of repair and circled by a broad stagnant moat. The space within—a small town in itself—occupied one-fourth of the city. A two-storeyed gate, on the west, opened straight into the streets of Kabul; and on the south-west, perched upon a cone-

shaped hill, towered the upper citadel, commanding the entire fort, city and suburbs. Though its own gateway and bastioned ramparts were now in ruins, it was evident even to Macnaghten that, from a military point of view, all hinged on repairing and securing this stronghold, wherein a thousand men and a few guns could cheerfully set all Afghanistan at defiance. The lower citadel contained buildings in plenty that could be utilized for troops and stores. But the Shah raised puerile difficulties; Macnaghten seemed loth to press the point; and Durand, in despair, appealed to Brigadier Sale. Between them they had their way, and the hero of Ghazni lost no time in setting his pioneers to work.

But his triumph was short-lived. Sight of the new scheme actually going forward proved too much for the royal nerves.

"Mackloton Sahib, this thing entirely may not be," declared his Majesty in a fever of agitation. "My people send complaints, many and urgent. If I close my ears to them, shall I not become unpopular even as the Amir? It is not meet that Feringhi soldiers be lodged in a fort overlooking mine own palace and grounds. Moreover, I was minded to make it a residence for the women of my household."

Objections frivolous enough, yet none too easily dismissed. By tact or insistence, a more resolute man had doubtless gained the day; but Macnaghten, fatally pliable at all times, was further hampered by his own false position. Without attempting to argue the point, he promptly put a stop to all work inside the Bala Hissar—and thereby laid the foundation-stone of ultimate disaster.

Kabul's one defensible position was turned into a harem for eight hundred and sixty chattering women, and the upper storey of the town gateway consecrated to the

royal band: tom-toms and long brass tubes that brayed and clattered and squealed in hideous dissonance at stated intervals during the day and night. How far Shah Shujah may have been prompted by the cunning of his race it were impossible to say. But if he secretly desired to cripple the power of his over-enterprising friends, this last ironic whim was a master-stroke indeed.

Foiled, disgusted, yet by no means baffled, young Durand still cherished a praiseworthy determination "to keep such hold of the Bala Hissar that its citadel could be occupied at any moment, should urgent need arise."

Looking round the lower citadel with this end in view, his choice fell upon two houses lately built by Dōst Mahomed for himself. These were set one at each end of a walled garden, and had been appropriated by Macnaghten for himself and his suite. But since he intended to winter with the King in the milder climate of Jalālabad, Durand ventured the suggestion that the Amir's houses would make fair officers' quarters; while sheds for the troops could soon be run up inside the walls. To him it seemed that, for a matter so important, he asked no great sacrifice of private convenience. But the proposal was ill received; and the harassed subaltern suggested instead that the native regiment should occupy the Shah's stables, while the 13th could be put under temporary cover near the upper citadel.

To this the Envoy agreed. But Shah Shujah and the Kazzilbash party were plainly set against any plan that would keep Kabul under efficient military control; and Macnaghten—painfully aware of the dissonance between British promise and British performance—yielded yet again, lest he engender suspicion that his Government meant to keep a permanent hold upon the country. The troops were graciously permitted to be quartered in the

Bala Hissar throughout the winter, on the understanding that, in the following spring, cantonments should be built on the plain without the walls.

Shah Shujah, having achieved his end, generously offered for this purpose one of his royal orchards; a long, low expanse of land, lying between river and canal, commanded on all sides by forts, villages and hills—a pleasant, innocuous spot for a military picnic; but less pleasant, and far from innocuous, when Reality, in terrible fashion, dispelled the Dream of a grateful King, a reformed Government and a devoted people.

In the circumstances, Durand was not sorry to find his name among those detailed to return with Lord Keane; and the General himself—who must have felt a warm regard for this gallant, capable subaltern—remarked to him on the day of departure: "I hoped you might remain here, for the good of the public service; but as it is, I can only congratulate you on quitting this country. For, mark my words, it will not be long before there is here some signal catastrophe."

But all thought of catastrophe was far from Macnaghten and from those who relied on his judgment. Almost in the same moment that he had demanded extra troops, "affairs were considered to be so secure that he and the married officers determined to send for their wives." John Conolly was despatched with an escort to bring from India some thirty English women and children, with all their household goods; and Captain George Lawrence of the 2nd Light Cavalry was appointed Personal Assistant to the Envoy in his stead.

A short, slim man with quick-glancing eyes like a bird, and an inexhaustible fund of energy and good spirits, was George Lawrence, commonly called "Cocky" Law-

rence by his friends. Singularly unlike his famous elder brothers, he yet shared, in full measure, many of their finest qualities; and in this respect, as in respect of personal devotion, Macnaghten could have made no happier choice. Lawrence's faith in the wisdom and ability of his chief remained invincible until the end; though, happily for himself and his wife, he refrained, in one important instance, from following that chief's lead. Let affairs be considered never so secure, he had the good sense to recognize that Afghanistan was no fit country for Englishwomen. Wherefore, when Lady Macnaghten and other deserted wives set out, eagerly enough, on their adventurous journey into the wilds, Charlotte Lawrence betook herself and her children to England with a heavy heart. But, before the Afghan drama was played out, she had reason to bless her husband's chivalrous consideration.

For the present, no doubt, many thought him foolish not to include his wife's name in Conolly's list. It seemed evident to all that Kabul was to become indefinitely a pleasant, healthy British cantonment, with a Royal Figurehead to keep up appearances. A false estimate of Afghan character, and the absence of anything like united opposition, tended insensibly to put them all off their guard; and, Keane's division being gone, those that remained proceeded to make themselves at home in their new surroundings with that ready adaptability to circumstance which has played no mean part in the building up of England's empire.

Macnaghten and his staff being comfortably established in the houses of Dōst Mahomed Khan, the Shah proceeded to bestow on other British officers sundry houses of departed chiefs; as though their property were confiscate, and the door of conciliation slammed in their

faces. But the new-comers were well content; more so, indeed, than the Afghans themselves. For, at Kabul, the prospect of Englishmen quartered in the city was viewed with a distaste and distrust that had been conspicuously absent at Herāt.

The reason for this lamentable fact has been justly, if severely, stated by Sir Henry Durand: "The first Mission to Kabul had established for the British moral character an ill reputation, and the conduct of some individuals, whom it is needless to particularize, was not calculated to remove this unfavourable impression. The consequence was that officers searching for residence in the city . . . heard their guides execrated for bringing licentious infidels into the vicinity."

It is possible—and not unnatural—to suppose that the evil repute of their own women may have increased the uneasiness with which Afghan men beheld that unknown quantity, the British officer, lodged within their gates. He was so lodged, nevertheless; and November the 4th was fixed by Macnaghten as the date on which the court, the Envoy and army headquarters would march down to winter at Jalālabad, leaving a detachment at Kabul under Brigadier Robert Sale.

But even before they left, signs were not wanting that the double government—theoretically supposed to work wonders—was already in a fair way to enrage and demoralize the whole nation. The one palpable reason for remaining in the country was to hedge in the king a little longer with a *cheveux de frise* of bayonets, and so establish him firmly on the throne. Yet the more zealously British authority upheld him, the less secure became his seat, the more unpopular his rule.

Silently, inexorably, from the very outset, did every move, every incident contribute its quota towards the

ultimate tragedy. Macnaghten — with characteristic blindness—deemed it possible to treat the Shah as an independent monarch, while keeping supreme authority in his own hands. Bound by treaty to avoid all internal interference, and instant in preaching that same doctrine to Pottinger at Herāt, yet was his own Afghan policy notoriously one of interference with every one and everything; of demolishing local rule and local custom in a land where both were a part of the national creed. He who had wavered where he should have stood firm, in respect of the Bala Hissar, now proceeded, at the king's desire, to crush where he should have conciliated the proud, fiercely independent chiefs of the land.

To this end he set about raising Afghan levies, nominally paid by the Shah, and officered by Englishmen. These, in time, became janissaries of Shah Shujah; held forts, collected revenues, and, in fine, struck a fatal blow not only at the power of the chiefs, but at the popularity of the King. As for the levies themselves, though they loved the gleam of good rupees, they hated the restraints of discipline; above all, when enforced by infidel Feringhis, no matter how gallant their bearing in the hour of danger.

Thus, upon every count, the new system—launched with such cheerful assurance—proved radically unsound; self-doomed, before long, to collapse with a crash and bury its authors in the ruins. "A mock King; a civil administration, hated because under foreign dictation; . . . an Envoy, the real King, ruling by the gleam of British bayonets; . . . a large army raising the price of provisions and preying upon a very poor country"—these were the disastrous results of failing to keep good faith with the Afghans and to withdraw the British army

while the moral effect of its successes had left an impression of power not to be lightly set at naught.

Yet William Macnaghten was "an honourable man." For all his ambition and shallow optimism, he firmly believed in the beneficence of his far-flung schemes for Central Asian expansion and reform; which belief—though it cannot but disarm blame—made his supremacy at Kabul the more dangerous for himself and for the honour of his country.

Before leaving for Jalālabad he seriously considered the contemplated change at Herāt, which, again, he persuaded himself would be a benefit for all concerned. As yet he had received no complete report from Todd. But seeing that he was fresher to Herāt, and less "prejudiced" than Pottinger as regards the Wazir, he could be trusted to take a more hopeful view of friendly possibilities; besides which he possessed the additional virtue of being Macnaghten's personal friend. Yes; unquestionably Todd was the man. The other's deserts were undeniable, and he should be well provided for; but Todd should remain at Herāt.

Thus Macnaghten; conveniently ignoring the fact that Pottinger would soon be arriving at Kabul, and had specially begged the Envoy to see him before taking any decisive steps as regards Herāt; ignoring also the definite opinion expressed by Lord Auckland in a minute, lately received.

"I would not disturb Lieutenant Pottinger at Herāt," wrote Lord Auckland on August the 20th. "His name is attached to the establishment of British influence in that city. He has had a most difficult task to execute; and I would suspend all opinion on his instructions . . . till I have a report of the result of the Mission of Major Todd." Login was suggested as a suitable assistant for

Pottinger; and with those two at Herāt—not over-much hampered by red tape—England might indeed have held her own there through all the stormy days to come.

But the conjunction of two officers so resolute, practical and clear-sighted was not at all to Macnaghten's taste. He had enough to contend with in that line, later on, at Kandahar. Invariably he fell foul of the strong, straight-spoken, uncompromising man; and, while admitting his virtues, personally desired him elsewhere.

In this instance the fact that he differed from Lord Auckland could be tactfully and discreetly subordinated to the peculiar circumstances of the case; and on October the 10th—before seeing Pottinger or receiving Todd's report—he wrote definitely to Torrens explaining why he deemed it "proper and expedient to relieve Lieutenant Pottinger permanently at Herāt." He did not wish "in any way to disparage so able and zealous an officer, who had represented the British Government in troublous times"; but begged leave to point out that "in the strict discharge of duty he had inevitably made many powerful enemies, whose influence would obstruct the success of any negotiations conducted through him." The Envoy hoped, in conclusion, that means might be found to employ Lieutenant Pottinger elsewhere in the sphere of his authority.

The "many powerful enemies" were a vague and visionary crew indeed; the few that existed being less inimical to the man than to the Power he stood for. But they looked convincing on paper; and doubtless Macnaghten believed in their existence. He despatched his letter accordingly, with a pleasing sense of duty accomplished, and in happy ignorance of the fact that he had rendered a better service to Pottinger than to his friend D'Arcy Todd.

XX

POTTINGER—as has been said—took his own time over that southward march.

Passing through the Hazara country by a new route, full of interest for the soul of an explorer, he decided to increase still further his knowledge of the country by approaching Kabul through the strange and remarkable valley of Bamián—destined to become verily and indeed the "valley of decision"; the scene of his last and proudest achievement in Afghanistan.

Thus he reached Kabul, early in November, to find that the Envoy, with his imposing *cortége* of royalty and troops, had already gone on before.

But the British element was still sufficiently in evidence to mark the drastic changes thrust upon the City of Orchards since he had slipped quietly away from her to meet the great adventure of his life. Into the Bala Hissar—where he had walked and talked to Dōst Mahomed and the Nawab Jubbar Khan—Sale's detachment of troops had brought an air of purposeful activity. A palace in the upper citadel—ominously christened Kulla-i-Feringhi [1]—had now become a rough field hospital, and at dawn the lively notes of *réveillé* clashed with the *muezzin's* long-drawn call to prayer.

As yet Pottinger saw in these things no reason for regret. Like most British officers in the country, he was fain to believe that nothing but good could spring from the dominance of right-minded Christian gentlemen over

[1] The European hat.

a nation of manly but savage barbarians, such as he had been contending with for the past two years. Nor was this belief, in the abstract, altogether wrong; but, in the concrete, those upright gentlemen were of very varied quality and capacity; while the cause for which they honestly laboured was inherently dishonest and unjust.

Pottinger was not tempted, on this occasion, to prolong his stay at Kabul. Ignorant of that letter to Lord Auckland, written a month ago, he had much to discuss with Macnaghten concerning the future of Herāt. Moreover, though no snow had yet fallen, it was bitterly cold; and the terrible series of passes between Kabul and Jalālabad were ill to traverse in winter—as every soldier in Afghanistan had yet to learn at a fearful cost to himself, his country, and those who loved him.

But on November the 29th Eldred Pottinger and his modest escort rode unmolested—without fear of present danger or future catastrophe—across ninety miles of hill-country, savage and rough-hewn as the men it breeds: rode, now through a grim, encompassing silence, that preyed upon the mind; now through the roar and rattle of mountain torrents, whose laughter woke demoniac responses from cliffs that closed in on either hand, implacable as Fate. Nine marches in all: but it is in the first six that the defiles of Afghanistan most fiercely and ferociously defy the intruder. Khurd-Kabul, Huft Kōtal, Tazin, Jagdalak, Gandamak—names at that time scarcely known even by Anglo-Indians, yet fated, within three short years, to become suddenly, tragically familiar; not in the East alone, but wherever three or four Englishmen were gathered together on the face of the earth.

On the evening of his first march Pottinger and his party encamped, nine miles out, at the entrance to the

first and most formidable defile of them all—the Khurd-Kabul Pass. After the sixth mile all trace of vegetation, all sign of life, human or animal, had ceased to be; and now, save for the riot and movement of the river, they seemed to have reached the very gate of death. Seen by starshine on a night of frost, the mass of converging hills loomed sullenly ahead—a stupendous ink-blot on the greyish-purple of a November sky. Dawn revealed them, starkly majestic, twin ranges of basalt, streaked with iron-stone and carven by snow and frost into craggy precipices, so lofty and close-set that down in the depths —where men and animals painfully followed the winding of the river—high noon was little more than gloaming; afternoon, night; and night itself black as the space between the worlds.

On first entering the chill twilight of this great defile, Eldred Pottinger had an awed, uplifted sense, as of passing into the precincts of a cathedral; a sense of remoteness from every-day realities. But when slowly, steadily, the cliffs drew in closer, as if threatening to wedge the life out of them in hideous Afghan fashion, uplifted awe gave place to a nameless oppression of spirit; and that in turn to sheer physical discomfort, which banished all else. Cold though it had been without, the cold within seemed to freeze blood and marrow. Everything was glazed with ice. Their breath froze hard on moustaches and beards. Icicles adorned the tails of the horses, their traces, manes and ears; and worse than all, the zig-zag course of the river involved constant crossing and recrossing, as in the Bolān. Twenty-eight times, in that terrible five miles, they splashed and scrambled through a torrent against which they could scarce hold their own; and always, within two minutes of emerging, the legs of men and horses were cased in ice.

Not until they neared the fourth milestone did the hills begin to open out and vouchsafe them a gleam of winter sunshine, that at least warmed their hearts if it could not thaw their frozen bodies. One mile more, and they were free of the Pass; another, and they had reached their camping ground near Khurd-Kabul village, after the severest day's march they had experienced since leaving Herāt.

Day after day the inhospitable face of the country showed little or no change. Even where the valleys widened, scarcely a sign of life appeared to soften the harsh outstanding features of rock and boulder and jagged escarpment, while the loose stones underfoot made progress painful as it was slow. For more than forty-two miles they rode through an unbroken succession of passes and defiles, sunless for the most part and piercing cold. But after Khurd-Kabul the rest were as nothing; till—beyond Katta Sung—they entered the gorge of the Jagdalak river, ironically named *Pari-Dari*,[1] and compared by those who have seen it to the Valley of Hell, near Freiburg. Here the cliffs crowded in close again—menacing, stupendous. In places they were scarce ten feet apart, the torrent zig-zagging between them almost at right angles—a defile practically impregnable, wherein a handful of troops might dispute the progress of an army; while an army ambuscaded between its walls of rock could be annihilated to a man.

Happily the Pass was but three miles long; and once through it, the worst of the road lay behind them. Another twenty-five miles of rough, but not formidable going brought them to a walled village on the table-land of Gandamak, where the river, in quieter mood, flowed between wheat fields, groups of cypresses and forest trees,

[1] The Fairy Pass.

backed by the outer spurs and snow-peaks of the Saféd Koh: a scene of pure refreshment after the rigours of that unforgettable journey.

Next morning, by an easy descent of five miles or so, they dropped into the valley of Nimlah, and beheld, afar off, its renowned garden of plane and cypress trees; its raised planks of masonry for encampment, where the tallest cypresses stood sentinel, as if round an Italian shrine. But the garden was already occupied in force. Tents large and small, tethered horses and cattle, all the miscellaneous litter of a moving city, proclaimed that they had overtaken the Court upon its southward march. Nearer approach revealed the high crimson *kanāts* that enclosed the sacred person of majesty, and Pottinger's Herātis, riding ahead, drew rein, gesticulating eagerly.

"Shahzāda Sahib!" they cried. "May the length of his shadow never diminish! Great is our *kismet*. For where the King rests his head, there will be food in plenty—and of the best!"

Nor were they mistaken. Pottinger certainly enjoyed food of the best in Macnaghten's well-appointed tent, where he dined with the Envoy and his staff, and sat talking late into the night.

If he had felt awkward at Kabul in his Afghan dress, he felt still more so, seated among men in immaculate coats and shirts at a civilized dinner-table, such as he had not seen for nearly three years. Now, too, for the first time, he met, face to face, the man he had so long known on paper.

Without, as within, the two made a striking contrast, apart from any accident of dress. The squarely-built subaltern, with the resolute mouth, the unadorned directness and sincerity of speech, was of another type altogether from the polished scholarly diplomat, who

spoke fluently in his own language and half-a-dozen others, and whose too-fertile imagination saw men and things as he would have them rather than as they were. To the practised observer, Macnaghten's face proclaimed the man. As the fine forehead and eyebrows were discounted by the arch of the eye, the insignificant mouth and non-committal chin; so were the man's undoubted intellect, imagination and courage discounted by lack of judgment, resolution and that inner sincerity which saves its possessor from the pitfalls of self-deception.

But on that first night of meeting there was much of general interest to tell; much to hear; and business was postponed to a more seasonable moment.

Next morning—while it was transacting in Macnaghten's office tent—George Lawrence wrote to Honoria, Henry's wife, of the interesting new arrival and of all he had to tell. "He seems an active, intelligent fellow, but not very bright," was the verdict of George, the perennially cheerful; though it may be doubted whether his own brightness would have been proof against two years of Herāt and Yar Mahomed Khan. "He dresses entirely as an Afghan; and hasn't a morsel of European clothing, except three shirts, made for him with great difficulty by an old lady at Herāt! Such beauties they are! He is going to join the Governor-General's camp to confer with his Lordship on Persian affairs. Login has given him a letter to Henry; so you may see him when he passes through Ferozepore."

Thus was John Login the means of bringing about a meeting not soon forgotten by either man; since each was quick to perceive in the other the same eternal elements that make for greatness.

But in the meantime, Pottinger had a Macnaghten to confer with before passing on to the fountain-head of

authority; a Macnaghten perturbed, not a little, by those October letters from Todd. That, in the face of a treaty signed and sealed, he should have to record fresh intrigues with Persia and see no alternative for England but to attack or be attacked! It was intolerable and not to be endured!

But if such barefaced Afghanism was news to Macnaghten, it was none to Pottinger.

"The signing and sealing of a dozen treaties would not change the Ethiopian's skin," he remarked drily. "It is all of a piece with the rest."

"Then, upon my soul!" cried the distracted envoy, "I've a good mind to break off the treaty, here and now; send an army to Herāt and add it to the Kabul crown. In no other way shall we ever secure his Majesty on the throne."

This from the man who had waxed eloquent on the imperative need for "preserving the integrity of Herāt."

Pottinger smiled thoughtfully. "If that had been done earlier, the State might have been saved a considerable sum of money."

"Yes—yes. No doubt." Macnaghten seemed to resent the implication. "But it is not too late yet. You will have a favourable opportunity of broaching the matter when you join the Governor-General. He will, I fancy, wish to detain you for a time at Calcutta, so that you may furnish Government with a memoir of your travels and a clearer statement of expenditure than we have received as yet."

Pottinger inclined his head and rose to depart. "In the circumstances I could do no better at the time," said he, "but I am most anxious to give his Lordship every facility for testing the accuracy of my accounts."

So they parted, for the time being, in all friendly

politeness, though it was plain, to Pottinger at least, that no confidential relation would ever be possible between them. He and his people moved on with the Court to Jalālabad, "Abode of Splendour"; a most miserable, mud-built town in a valley of sand and stones; its bastions and walls so ruinous that through the breaches cattle were driven out to graze; its ten brass guns mounted on useless carriages; its royal residence, a barn.

Here Pottinger parted company, not unwillingly, with the uncomfortable formalities of an oriental court in motion. Before leaving, it was agreed that beyond the Khyber he would no longer need the double escort of Sepoys and Herātis which had accompanied him throughout. This was ill news for the latter. If they might no longer serve the Sahib, who had taught them to know the meaning of justice, they begged that, at least, they might not be dismissed from British service; and might, also, as a mark of great favour, be allowed to keep the horses given them at Herāt. Needless to say their requests were granted. No man who had done Pottinger a service, even of the slightest, was ever forgotten or overlooked by him; and this his faithful remnant—many of whom had been stripped and beaten for their devotion—were assured that they need have no fear. Six of them, under Allah Dad Khan, he gained leave to take on with him down country. For the others, he arranged with Macnaghten that they should be retained as Irregular Horse, and be left, in passing, with Captain Mackeson at Fort Jamrud.

Once beyond Peshawar, with Afghanistan behind him and the unknown Punjab before, his reduced party marched steadily southward, without fear of let or loss; halting at this or that point, as inclination prompted,

in the pleasant, deliberate fashion of a day untroubled by the tyranny of speed.

Lahore, Ferozepore, Kurnal, Delhi, Agra—fresh revelations, all, to the Bombay subaltern, and welcome additions to his store of geographical knowledge. At Ferozepore he spent a few days with Login's friend Henry Lawrence and his wife—ardent wedded lovers, happy in the possession of their first son: at Kurnal, another few days with Tom Pottinger—mightily pleased at his promotion to acting-adjutant, and zealously studying the language in view of further honours: and always there was the abiding interest in his Herāti boys, the memoir of his recent Hazara journey and the companionship of his faithful friend Hakeem Mahomed Hussain. The good man had refused the offer of a hundred rupees a month from Todd, choosing rather to bestow his services on "the saviour of Herāt" and accompany him, as Mirza, to Calcutta—that wonderland of learning, where Pottinger promised he would gain leave for him to attend all public lectures on medicine or surgery, and study at first-hand the management of British hospitals. Thus the foundation laid by Conolly Sahib would be completed by his honourable successor, whom Allah would assuredly requite with health and many honours and length of days. But the requitals of Allah, though they fail not, are rarely recognizable as such by the children of men.

Not until New Year's Day was passed, and they were nearing Gwalior, did they hear any word of the Governor-General, who was at that time marching through the plains of central India on his winter tour of inspection and of diplomatic intercourse with friendly chiefs.

But at Gwalior men told them: "Great is your good fortune. The *Burra Lāt Sahib* himself is encamped

here." Nor was it long before their eyes, and their nostrils also, confirmed the news.

For outside the high walls of crimson cloth, that encompassed the elect, were bell-tents of native servants and followers innumerable; camp-fires of dung-cakes and wood; lines of tethered horses, mules, bullocks, camels and elephants. Within was a city of tents—sleeping-tents, mess-tents, cooking-tents and office-tents: officers in uniform; servants of all grades—superciliously inclined towards strangers and pilgrims; *chuprassis* in scarlet and gold, more supercilious still. And in the midst, enclosed by a lesser crimson wall, the *sanctum* of his Lordship the Governor-General, with his sisters, Fanny and Emily Eden; lively, talented women who—in part for love of their brother and in part for love of a unique experience—cheerfully endured, each winter, the discomforts inseparable from a moving camp, no matter how luxuriously appointed and laid out.

To this focal point in the great circle Eldred Pottinger made his way; eyed, as he went, with passing curiosity by his own countrymen, who took him for some Afghan dignitary come to confer with his Lordship on the supreme subject of the hour. Inside the crimson *kanāts* three large private tents, a dining-tent and magnificent durbar tent were set so as to form a courtyard, with covered passages to protect the ladies from cold and damp.

Conducted to Lord Auckland's tent, Pottinger was received as warmly as if he had been a personal friend. He found his Lordship elated at the news that the fortress of Khelāt had been carried by Willshire "quite in the Ghazni manner"; though stout old Mahrab Khan had fought like a lion to the last and died, sword in hand, with a bullet through his heart. Of Macnaghten and his doings he spoke with more reserve. There had been

too much insistence on troops lately to suit the man who had been lured from the path of peace and prudence against his better judgment; and he was in no mind to sanction fresh hostilities in the direction of Herāt. He had already written his mind to Sir William on that score; and now chiefly desired a full account of Pottinger's own actions; a desire Pottinger was neither willing nor able to fulfil. But, himself excluded, he found much to say of Herāt, and of the good work started there by the officers of the Mission.

The approach of the dinner hour found the incongruous pair still deep in talk.

"You will join us to-night, of course," said his Lordship graciously, and for a second Pottinger was smitten dumb. Here was an honour he neither dreamed of nor desired; and although the invitation was a command, he made a clumsy attempt to excuse himself on the score of possessing no suitable clothes.

Lord Auckland airily dismissed the difficulty. His native dress would but add to the interest of his presence in their midst: and Pottinger must needs bow to the inevitable.

It was already late; and the great man, full of his own thoughts, hurried away with never a word to any one of his unexpected guests.

Pottinger, having no toilet to delay him, entered the great dining-tent in good time, privately cursing his luck.

Half-a-dozen officers in mess uniform stood together round the stove. They glanced up at his entrance; saw a fair-skinned native, unknown to any of them; raised their eyebrows in polite amazement—and went on talking. They supposed he must have come in by accident, and discovering his mistake, would go quietly out.

But he did nothing of the sort. Though uniformed backs were turned upon him, he stood his ground, leaning against a tent-pole, outwardly composed, inwardly wishing the ground would open and receive him before Lord Auckland arrived.

The officers round the stove began to whisper among themselves; not too quietly, for none imagined he could understand.

"Deuced impertinent fellow," said one. "Wants to catch his Excellency, no doubt, about some favour that has been refused."

"Lord Auckland brings this sort of thing on himself," said another. "Treats any black devil as if he were one of *Us*. We can't have this fellow in here when the ladies come. Some one ought to turn him out."

This last seemed the general opinion. But although several others came in, and glanced inquiringly at the man without a wedding garment, the necessary "some one" did not appear to be forthcoming.

Unmistakable voices outside made the officers near the stove start guiltily, and exchange glances of dismay.

Lord Auckland entered, with the Honourable Emily Eden—in elaborate flounces and costly Kashmir shawl—leaning upon his arm. Then did dismay give place to dumb surprise. For the "native" leaning against the tent-pole straightened himself and smiled. Lord Auckland beamed on him as on a friend, came forward briskly, and turning to his sister, presented the intruder with a gracious wave of his hand.

"My dear," said he, "we are greatly honoured this evening. Let me introduce you—to the hero of Herāt!"

Miss Eden swept a curtsey. Pottinger, tingling to the roots of his hair, bowed in response. At once the whole tent was in commotion. The officers of the staff

pressed eagerly forward; and, in defiance of etiquette, the whole assembly broke out into disjointed cheers.

It was a proud, yet acutely uncomfortable moment for a modest man. Eldred Pottinger had felt far less perturbed in the clutches of Yakub Beg and in the breaches of Herāt, than upon that evening of January when he sat down to dinner between the Honourable Emily Eden and his Excellency the Governor-General of India.

XXI

The news of victory, that had so elated Lord Auckland, was true indeed.

Justly or unjustly, Khelāt had been stormed and carried. Willshire had won laurels due to Nott; and Mehrab Khan—who, five years earlier, had saved a fleeing and defeated Shah Shujah from the wrath of his enemies—had paid for that act of hospitality with his life. After his death it was found that he had been surrounded by traitors who had secretly frustrated his attempts at negotiation. But the harm was done; and none appeared to dream of reparation. The Khan's son became a homeless fugitive; a more pliable instrument filled his place; and yet another seed of hatred to Shah Shujah and his allies was sown in the hearts of a people who neither forget or forgive.

As to the British officers, probably few among them had enough knowledge of details to be troubled with doubts concerning the justice of these things. Certainly none gave a thought to the secondary act of injustice involved; to the fine old soldier, eating his heart out at Quetta, hoping against hope for the crumb of consolation flung to him by Keane, that, at any moment, he might be ordered to advance on Khelāt. Instead, his worst fears had been realized; and insult added to injury by an intimation that he (Nott) was to hold himself and his troops in readiness to act under Willshire's orders should the need arise. To have missed Ghazni was cruel enough; but here was an arrow tipped with the poison of personal

malice, and the wound it inflicted festered the more. But months of quiet, healthy life at Quetta had calmed his excitable temper; and he merely wrote that any request for aid would be complied with; but, conceiving himself senior to local Major-General Willshire, he could neither serve under that officer nor obey orders issued by him. In his eyes this firm, yet temperate protest, seemed a duty not merely to himself, but to that ill-used Indian army, whose honour was dearer to him than his own. Weary of abstract protests, he hoped thus to bring the whole question to an issue. But since the death of his wife it was as if an evil fate pursued him. No hope, however reasonable, was fulfilled.

Sir John Keane forwarded the protest to Lord Auckland, who—in due course—notified his high displeasure, and called upon Major-General Nott either to obey Government orders, in respect of local Major-Generals, or resign his command.

It needed but this to break a spirit already subdued by personal sorrow. Nott tendered his submission on paper, merely regretting that his position had not been made clear to him from the first. But, in his heart, he resolved to throw up the command. He sent word to his girls; and had even begun to pack up his belongings—when lo! a blue envelope from the Auditor-General, and within it an order to refund the sum of nine thousand rupees, which he had drawn as allowance for commanding the first division of the Bengal army.

Stunned for the moment, his wrath flamed up the more fiercely at thought of the loss and mortification involved. But, for the sake of his daughters, he could and did submit to all—endure all.

To them alone he poured forth the bitterness and anger that consumed him. "I told you that in the nine-

teenth century they would not dare to hang me," he wrote after breaking the news. "But they are not ashamed to rob me. I am sorry for this great loss on your account. Did it only touch myself, I should laugh in scorn. To refund this large sum, the Pay Department coolly propose to take possession of my six months batta donation, and to deduct 1500 rupees a month from my pay bill, leaving me 500 rupees to wend my way with. This is, I must confess, a very disagreeable affair. You will perceive that economy will be necessary. I will live almost upon the wind to pay this *very honourable* and *just* debt! They have done their worst; but my bones will not rest a bit the sooner in the tomb for their rascally conduct. If I can possibly arrange money matters, I will still quit this, and march for Calcutta. Why should I remain here? I never will, if I can possibly avoid it, serve under a Fane General, if fifty orders were to come from England!"

By the time matters had reached this pass he had left Quetta, and was installed at Kandahar in command of four native regiments, a few troops of cavalry and sixteen guns. November found him fairly settled in for the winter, writing, as usual, fully and regularly to one or other of his beloved girls. "Here I am, in a house for the first time during the last thirteen months. It is an upper-roomed one, and belongs to his Majesty. My friend, Sir J. Keane, had sent an order from Kabul directing this house to be appropriated for the commissariat treasury; I suspect, merely to prevent my getting it; however, the house is in the citadel, and as I command the garrison, I declared to the functionaries that I would have it, in spite of Sir J. Keane's order. I accordingly ordered it to be vacated; and I am now writing to you from a snug corner room upstairs. . . . To-day we

have had another fall of snow. I have had all my doors shut, and am now writing in a small room, with a large fire close to my left hand, and a small glass door (which I had made on arrival) on my right; and I fancy myself very snug.

"For the last eight days I have been three or four hours each day on horseback, galloping in every direction, always at full speed, wrapped up in my large military cloak. I can assure you it is *no joke* for the orderly troopers who follow me in my rambles. . . . This is really a much finer climate than England. Yesterday I had four regiments out at exercise; and although I galloped for upwards of two hours, I still remained cold."

This simple, strenuous fashion of life thoroughly suited his taste; only the abiding sense of injustice, in all quarters, rankled within. But happily, for once, he was permitted to taste the sweets of reparation. For in April came another Government letter, cancelling the ungenerous order, and crediting him with the sum already deducted—four thousand rupees. This he thankfully set aside as a nest-egg for his "children," after spending a small amount on additional comforts in view of the approaching hot weather. Glass doors and windows were added to his house; and a Bengal punkah, the first ever seen at Kandahar, hung up in his largest room. But, apart from these luxuries, the old man continued to live as hardly and simply as any subaltern in his command.

On the whole that winter of '39–40 was a peaceful and pleasant one for William Nott. He enjoyed the climate, admired the people and found plenty of congenial occupation to hand in reviving and reorganizing the army of Kandahar. Afghans in the surrounding villages soon came to know and—better still—to welcome the pic-

turesque figure on the bay horse, which soon became a characteristic feature of the countryside. Virile and vigorous in no usual degree, Nott was the very man to command their admiration; the very man whose presence at headquarters might have gone far to mitigate the universal hatred of British occupation. But unhappily for both races, petty prejudice, and Macnaghten's dread of his stubborn independence, kept him more or less in the background from first to last.

So the winter passed—quietly at Kandahar; imposingly at Jalālabad, where the Shah indulged to the full his passion for the pomps and vanities of kingship; and at Kabul cheerfully enough, in spite of disturbing rumours as to the movements of the Amir, the increasing arrogance of Yar Mahomed and the advance of Russian battalions; a topic of unfailing interest, this last.

The severity of winter in Afghanistan makes it a time of enforced quiet even for so restless and quarrelsome a people. Predatory expeditions are rare. No caravans come and go, as in summer, dispensing provisions and news. But the handful of British officers at Kabul, thrown upon their own resources, were by no means at a loss for amusement. Like Nott, they made many individual friends among the Afghans. But his intimacy was rather with the people; theirs with the chiefs, who invited them freely to their town houses and country castles; and were no less freely entertained in return. At the weekly guest nights of the 13th and 35th they enjoyed themselves to the top of their bent; cracking rough jokes with the officers; eating and drinking all that came their way as indiscriminately as though there were no "prohibitive clauses" in the Koran or elsewhere. The British officers, in their turn, found the shooting of quail and snipe at Afghan country castles more congenial

than musical evenings of the type sampled by Outram and his friends.

With the waning of summer, cricket and horse-racing had been exchanged for football, hockey and quoits. High stakes were wagered over fighting cocks and rams, and feats of wrestling, wherein the Afghans—to their frank surprise—found themselves overthrown again and again by their new friends. None the less it took time to convince them that men who hailed from the plains of Hindostan could be other than effeminate folk, unused to the rigours of snow and ice, which they reckoned, next to warfare, the most potent makers of men. Great, then, was their wonder when they beheld these versatile Feringhis rejoicing in the severe frost of December; and praying for snow before Christmas to remind them of home.

And there was yet greater wonder in store. On a crisp, cloudless day of December they took a party of Englishmen to the lake that lies five miles beyond Kabul. Here, by now, the ice was strong enough for running, sliding and other winter sports, wherein they excelled. The Feringhis, they were convinced, could not beat them on this, their own ground. And at first it seemed that they were right. The English officers—many of whom had not set foot on ice for ten or twelve years—could not run upon the slippery surface like their light-footed friends; and their attempts at sliding were so ungainly that the Afghans shouted aloud in good-humoured derision.

"Aha! Spake we not the truth?" cried one. "You are no true men of the North, if you cannot run upon ice."

The subalterns joined in the laugh against themselves; but protested that, given time for practice, they

would run upon ice with the swiftest Afghan of them all.

Then they took counsel together how their national supremacy might be asserted and their boast made good. In a city so full of skilled artificers, it surely must be possible to find one who could make skates from a rough model. It was possible; and the needful model was achieved by Sinclair, of the 13th, a notable man of his hands. Old iron, smelted and hardened, served for blades; and the rest was simple enough. For the skate of 1839 was a very primitive affair of wood and iron and straps.

So the artificers worked, and the subalterns rejoiced —strictly in private. At length, upon the appointed day, they announced a forthcoming *tamasha* on the lake that should prove them true men of the North, and cause the Afghans to open their eyes and their mouths wider than ever before. Nor were they disappointed of their hope.

It was a proud moment when they set out, skates hanging over their shoulders, as in the days of boyhood; prouder still when they strapped them on under the eyes of a curious crowd. Then, with one accord, they rose up; staggered, swayed—and after the first ungainly lunges, dashed forward in gallant style; backed, wheeled, cut threes and eights with shouts of exultation, heartily echoed by the gazers on the shore. Amid a chorus of "*Wah—wahs*," "*Inshallahs*" and much solemn wagging of beards, the Afghans declared themselves nonplussed by this incredible magic of running upon ice with knives.

"*Now* we have proof that you are not as the infidel Hindus," cried he who had derided on that earlier day. "By the Prophet's beard you are men indeed; born and bred like ourselves, in a country where the changing

seasons give equal vigour to body and mind. Great would have been our *kismet*, and your own, had you come among us as friends, not as enemies. One by one, you are fine fellows enough. But as a nation we hate you from the heart; because we also are men, like yourselves, loving liberty better than life."

It was an honest statement of fact; and it put the whole truth in a nutshell. Individually, many Englishmen in Afghanistan commanded liking and even admiration. As a body they could not be otherwise than hateful to men who grew daily more impatient of a foreign yoke and of a King who cared for nothing save their genuflexions and their money, which last was dear to them as liberty itself.

But during that first sociable winter, with its friendly rivalry in hospitality and sport, it was impossible for British officers, ignorant of the country, to realize that, even then, they were treading on concealed fire; fire that could not fail to burn the more fiercely for its very repression, till it demolished the surface crust of friendship and broke up the ground under their feet.

XXII

But if the officers at Kabul were ignorant of the country and its people, Sir Alexander Burnes was not. Disappointed of the speedy promotion he looked for, and bitterly discontented with his present anomalous position, he watched with half cynical amusement the lively amenities between city and Bala Hissar. Himself more student than sportsman, he seldom took an active part in them; yet his hospitality and lively humour made him a general favourite; for he kept open house, and entertained his guests in a style commensurate with a salary of 2500 rupees a month. There was, indeed, little else for him to do. "Reading and imprisoning rupees," he wrote to Lord, "are now my engagements;" and he had carried a varied assortment of books with him to the ends of the earth. Tacitus, Horace, Guizot, lives of Sidney Smith and Warren Hastings—each in turn served as anodyne to a man hungering for active, responsible work; and diverted his mind from brooding on the unfulfilled promise that Macnaghten's early return to India should leave him paramount—virtual ruler of Afghanistan.

And in the intervals of reading, his pen was unceasingly occupied, either with the inevitable journal of the period, or with discursive letters to relations and friends: for next to hearing his own voice, Burnes loved nothing better than airing himself on paper. Condemned as he was to the rôle of looker-on, he undoubtedly saw more of the game than Macnaghten; but, his observations and

opinions being apparently superfluous, he bestowed them mainly on his bosom friend and fellow-political, Doctor Percival Lord; the Hakeem Sahib who ran!

Upon the exposure of his credulity, Lord had set out again for Bamián; and was there established with his small detachment, which had been far better occupied in drilling and parading at Kabul, than in lending military significance to the vagaries of a political "Fidgety Phil." Aptly described as "ingenious in alarm," he spent most of the winter in discovering pretexts for petty, yet aggressive action; for "frustrating embryo insurrections," and generally making the name of Feringhi detested by tribes who would otherwise have been neutral, if not over-friendly, toward Shah Shujah and the British Raj. But in Lord's eyes the game of central Asian politics was a means to one end only—personal distinction; and to sit quiet was to be overlooked. Vain as he was ambitious, he little guessed that his high-sounding dispatches were ridiculed by Keane and bemoaned by Lord Auckland, who dreaded the costliness of fresh entanglements beyond the Hindu Khush. But Lord went on his way rejoicing; though he again—like Burnes and Macnaghten, in '38,—was enthusiastically digging his own grave.

Far less astute than Burnes, Lord was fully his equal in ambition, restlessness and lack of judgment. Indeed, it seems more than probable that the irresponsibility of those earliest Afghan politicals, Burnes, Lord and Leech —to say nothing of Macnaghten's tragic example—went far to induce the sweeping denunciations which, for a time, it became the fashion to hurl at a remarkably able, upright and courageous body of men. The first three had been closely associated in the original Kabul Mission, and had remained firm friends. So it happened that

when, in the winter of his discontent, Burnes was moved to discursiveness, he bestowed it all upon the man who could be trusted to applaud his personal point of view.

Fragments from these voluminous letters, written between November and March, give a lively picture of men and events, coloured always with the writer's egotism, shrewdness and humour. Russia, the supreme topic of that winter, naturally stands first. Her advance of troops from Orenburg to Khiva was justifiable enough; provided the troops went no farther. The Khan of Khiva had been systematically harassing her merchants; interrupting intercourse, and carrying off her subjects into slavery; and, peaceful remonstrance having failed, she now put forth the armed protest of the stronger power. It seems probable that if Great Britain had not waxed zealous over Shah Shujah's claims, Russian subjects might have languished in captivity unheeded; but even as a strategical counter-move, no honest man—in the face of Macnaghten's Afghan policy—could denounce it as inexpedient or unjust. None the less, among the more forward politicals, it could not fail to create excitement amounting to alarm.

But by January, Burnes' letters were concerned with troubles nearer home.

"How can I say things go wrong? My dear Lord—sheets are writ in praise of the Shah's contingent. Yet—God is my judge—I tremble every time it is employed, that it will compromise its officers. The Shah can never be left without a British army; for his own will never be fit for anything. . . . For myself, imprisoning rupees and reading are now my engagements; and I have begun this year with a resolution of making no more suggestions and of only speaking when spoken to. I do not say this

in ill humour—quite the reverse. A screw from Machiavelli supports me. 'A man who, instead of acting for the best, acts as he ought, seeks rather his ruin than his preservation. . . .'

"Lord Auckland took a step, in sending an army into this country, contrary to his own judgment, and he cares not a sixpence what comes of his policy, so he gets out of it. All the dispatches plainly prove this; and Macnaghten now begins to see his own false position; suggests remedies; and finds himself, for the first time, snubbed by the very Governor-General whose letters have been hitherto a fulsome tissue of praise. The Envoy sees that Russia is coming on; that Herāt is not what it ought to have been—ours; and his dawning experience tells him that, if not for us, it is against us. What says Lord Auckland? 'I disagree with you. Yar Mahomed is to be conciliated. I do not credit Russia's advance on us. . . . I wonder,' adds his Lordship, 'that you should countenance attacks on Herāt contrary to treaty' (who made that treaty? Macnaghten!); 'that you should seek for more troops in Afghanistan. It is your duty to rid Afghanistan of troops.' All very fine, but mark the result—calamity, loss of influence, and with it loss of rupees.

"In these important times, what occupies the King and this Envoy? The cellars of his Majesty's palace have been used as powder-magazines to prevent a mosque being 'desecrated.' They would have been put in the citadel; but his Majesty objected, as they overlooked his harem! This objection dire necessity has removed, and to the citadel they have gone. See what is said of Colonel Dennie's occupying, not the palace, but a house outside, held formerly by sweepers and Hindoos! From this, in the midst of winter, he has been ejected; but he declares,

before God, that it shall be the Governor-General alone who turns him out. These are the occupations of the King and Envoy!

"What, my dear Lord, do I mean by all this? *Ex uno disce omnes.* Be silent, pocket your pay, do nothing but what you are ordered, and you will give high satisfaction. They will sacrifice you and me, or any one, without caring a straw. This does not originate from vice, I believe, but from ignorance. An *exposé* of our policy from the day we were bound hand and foot at Lahore, till Shah Shujah threatened to resign because the cellars of his palace were occupied by munitions of war, when Russia was on the Oxus, would make a book which future diplomatists could never, in blunder, surpass. But why should it be otherwise? The chief priest, ere he started, asked if Khiva were on the Indus. Bah! I blame the Governor-General for little; if he is a timid man, he is a good man. Wade hoodwinked him about Kabul when I was here; another now hoodwinks him. The one cost us two millions, the other will cost us ten. His Lordship has just written to me to give him my say on public matters. Am I a fool? He does not want truth; he wants support; and when I can give it I shall do so loudly; when I cannot, I shall be silent——

"Feb. 18. The Envoy is, or pretends to be, greatly annoyed at my being left out of the list of the honoured. I am not in the least surprised. Every month brings with it proofs of Lord A.'s hostility or dislike. Serves me right. I ought never to have come here, or allowed myself to be pleased with fair though false words. . . . I bide my time, and I may be set down as highly presumptuous; but if I live, I expect to be a G.C.B. instead of a C.B.——

"March 4. There is no two days' fixity of purpose here—no plan of a future policy. The bit-by-bit system prevails. Nothing comprehensive is looked to; the details of the day suffice to fill it up, and the work done is not measured by its importance, but by being work. I for one begin to think Wade will be the luckiest of us all to be away from the break-down; for, unless a new leaf is turned over, break down we shall."

So early did the dread Inevitable—hovering over Afghanistan like a bird of prey—cast its shadow upon those who were not blinded to reality by their own conceits and desires. In September, Keane, in March, Burnes struck the same ominous note of prophecy; and in April 1840, Nott replied to Cotton's request for his opinion on the situation in a more temperate, though scarcely a more hopeful strain.

"You must be a better judge than I am of the feelings of the Afghans; but, in the event of any disturbance, I believe they would almost to a man join the Chief Dōst Mahomed Khan. . . . Our force on this side of the Indus is not sufficient for a further advance; indeed, unless you get large reinforcements, you will find some difficulty in holding your ground at Kabul and in the Khyber Pass."

But from Sir William Macnaghten, as yet, no word of prevision; though, from October to April, he had been beset with discouraging revelations.

Even before Keane left the country he had witnessed the first-fruits of that fatal double government in a revolt of the Khyber tribes. The Shah—whom aforetime they had concealed and protected—had promised them, unknown to Macnaghten, a higher subsidy than the Envoy felt justified in paying; and Afridi retaliation took the immemorial form of blocking up their passes,

attacking scattered detachments and generally making themselves as unpleasant as adepts in guerrilla warfare know how to do. Captain Mackeson, the Peshawur political, reasoned with them placably; Colonel Wheeler from Jalālabad reasoned more forcibly; with small result. Then, in December, Macnaghten with a small *cortège* marched down to Peshawur to meet the longed-for convoy of wives and children; and the formidable nature of Afridi defiles, once realized, proved a more potent argument than their former services or the word of a king. A compromise was arrived at and good conduct vouched for—till next time.

But the Afridi outbreak was a mere drop in the ocean of his difficulties; a preliminary note of warning, which he was not the man to heed. Before winter was well over the same dread note echoed throughout the kingdom—east and west; south and north. In whichever direction he turned his hopeful gaze, something or other was going wrong.

The Durāni chiefs in the region of Kandahar no longer professed a loyalty that would obviously avail them nothing. The Ghilzais around Ghazni and Jalālabad, though crushed for the moment, were very far from subdued. Fighters in the grain, jealous of their unbroken independence, and deeply mistrustful of the new order, they awaited only the melting of snow and ice to make their hostility more practically felt. In Mehrab Khan's country, the Beluchis were already up in arms against the weak tool Macnaghten had enthroned in his stead. The Sikhs—regardless of treaty and subsidy—were harbouring rebel Ghilzai chiefs, and openly intriguing with the Barakzais. At Herāt—as events shall show—Yar Mahomed was rising each month to more flagrant heights of insolence and daring; and from Bokhara came word of

Stoddart's second imprisonment, aggravated by ill-treatment.

This last so wrought upon the kindly-hearted Envoy, that he promptly made arrangements for that northward Mission, which failed to free Stoddart and sent Arthur Conolly to his death.

But from Bokhara came also the one gleam that lighted the gloom of Macnaghten's political horizon.

For it happened that Dōst Mahomed, intending to seek asylum in Persia, had been lured by friendly promises of help to turn aside and visit the lesser chief. With him went his sons Akbar and Afzul Khán; the latter having been forgiven for his attack of nerves at sight of the Union Jack flying over Ghazni. Wives, daughters, younger sons, relations and slaves—a motley crowd of two hundred and fifty souls—had been left with that most astute of men, the Nawab Jubbar Khan, in the hospitable country of Kulam, east of the Hindu Kush. In December the Dōst had entered Bokhara, where he was received with all courtesy and distinction. His party was fed from the royal table; intermarriages were arranged that should clinch the bonds of union. Finally it was proposed that the deserted two hundred and fifty, with all the family jewels and treasure, should be brought up from Kulam; and that the Dōst—being short of money—should dismiss all his followers save a personal escort of two hundred horse. These last plans did not find favour in his eyes; but, being Afghan to the core, he feigned agreement; and, by the same *Kasid*, wrote secretly to Jubbar Khan bidding him kill every man, woman and child, rather than let them out of his safe keeping.

Time passed; and passing, brought no sign of the Afghan zenana and treasure. Then the Bokhara chief

—furious at being foiled of his purpose, and jealous of the Dōst's popularity with his own people—flung father and sons into prison, bidding them there remain till the rest of their family came to join them.

Here was news to lift the heart of Shah Shujah and enable Macnaghten to breathe more freely.

In his opinion it were common prudence to secure the two hundred and fifty, as hostages; common hospitality to proffer them support and "honourable asylum," provided they would live where they were told. But Shah Shujah, stolid, selfish and remorseless, refused to contribute a rupee for their benefit. Often though he had been a fugitive, dependent on the generosity of others, he had no bowels of compassion for those in a like case: nor was the subtle Nawab much readier to accept Feringhi overtures than those of Bokhara. Permitted by the Wāli of Kulam to levy dues on passing *kafilas* for the support of his huge family, he held his ground in that country for months to come.

May found Macnaghten, with all his royal paraphernalia, back at Kabul;—a glorified Kabul, clad in fruit blossoms, wild flowers and young corn. The presence of English ladies and children added a homely, sociable air to the place, making it seem more than ever like a northern Indian station; and very soon came further good news that raised the barometer of men's spirits all over the country.

The Russian battalions, that Macnaghten vainly yearned to overawe, had succumbed to weapons more irresistible than musket and sword. First snow, then pestilence and famine had so thinned their ranks, that all thought of advance had to be given up—for, like the army of Sennacherib, "they were all dead men."

Despite the tragedy involved, harassed Afghan

politicals let out a unanimous breath of relief; while the excursive brain of Macnaghten—which had been roaming at large beyond the Hindu Kush—returned with zest to such minor items in his comprehensive programme as the annexation of Herāt, the Punjab and Nepal.

"We have a beautiful game on our hands," he confided to a friend, "if only we have the inclination to play it properly." Wherefore—in spite of evidence that Lord Auckland cherished no inclination for wholesale absorption—he proceeded to call for more troops and more money, that he might carry on, unhampered, his "beautiful game" of knocking down and setting up kingdoms and principalities to the tune of "See the Conquering Hero Comes." Small wonder if, as the year wore on, the fulsome tissue of praise, hitherto woven at the Simla Secretariat, were chequered with hints at mismanagement and expressions of uneasiness amounting to alarm.

XXIII

THAT there were ample grounds for uneasiness cannot be denied. For while Afghanistan's Envoy—like another Johnny-head-in-air—strode across Asia and took counsel with the stars, a fresh crop of dangers flourished unobserved at his very feet.

With the first breath of spring the Ghilzais were "up" round Ghazni, enjoying themselves finely and cutting off communications between Kabul and Kandahar. Later on, Khelāt broke out into a fierce spasm of unrest. Quetta was besieged by Kakurs. The son of Mehrab Khan was afoot with intent to oust the usurper, and all Beluchistan was flocking to his aid.

Fortunately Macnaghten had a general of Nott's calibre in that region; a blessing he was strangely slow to appreciate. But Nott—inured by now to lack of official appreciation—did his duty none the less thoroughly for that. With the Ghilzais his officers dealt promptly and successfully. The money-bag was called in to supplement the bayonet; and, for the moment, it suited the "rebels" to accept the only forms of argument they could respect or understand. Khelāt was a lengthier, more complicated affair. But here, too—as in every chance of action vouchsafed him—Nott ultimately gained the day.

To his "children" the whole tale was told in vigorous fashion, interlarded with no less vigorous denunciation of the "high authorities at Kabul" and all their works:

denunciation at times too caustic and sweeping; yet rarely, if ever, without some foundation in fact.

From his camp in the Ghilzai country he wrote on the 21st of June: "Contrary to my repeated advice, the great people at Kabul *would* send a large force into the Ghilzai country, and they would drag me from Kandahar to command it. In fact, they were terribly alarmed, and would not believe me when I told them that the detachment I sent out under Anderson would put down rebellion. . . . Now they are sore and angry, because that was done in a few days which *they* had been talking and writing about for six months; so that they will not give Anderson one line of praise for a smart action: the only one in which the much-talked-of Army of the Indus met an enemy who fought daringly and bravely.

"Well, after this, the people at Kabul sent down political agents, troops and the Prince Royal Timour; and they have, by their measures, done all in their power to goad the people into fresh rebellion.

"I have not, just now, a moment to spare, or I could show you *such* a scene. In my opinion, the conduct of the English authorities has been so atrocious that the Press will be full of it. I have again written, begging them to withdraw the Kabul troops. . . .

"I know not what I am writing, as some fifty Afghans are at my tent door, crying loudly for justice. Now justice is a scarce article under the Shah's government; but these simple people fancy that the General Sahib, with an army at his nod, can do wonders for them.

"I have had, yesterday and to-day, every officer in camp at my tent. I fancy most of them merely came to see the beast who annoyed and defied Sir John Keane and Lord Auckland, and ruined himself and all his prospects. Never mind—the grave will soon cover me. . . ."

And again on the 4th of July—from the same camp—he wrote of another conflict very different from Captain Anderson's gallant little action in May.

"The high authorities at Kabul are alarmed beyond measure, and I have had occupation sufficient in answering their long and foolish letters. They are like small birds, frightened in a storm, ready to perch upon anything for protection. Poor men! What will they do when *real* danger comes? And I think it is possibly at hand, owing to their false measures.

"Ten days ago I sent in a long statement regarding this district, with arguments and arrangements directly contrary to their instructions. I have just received an answer agreeing to my proposals. *But*—they have not pardoned one of the rebel chiefs, who has taken refuge in the mountains, *because* the Shah has a personal dislike to him! So that this chief is left as an outlaw, and will, of course, become reckless, and take the first opportunity of again erecting the standard of rebellion. . . .

"Unless the Shah and his advisers turn over a new leaf we shall have plenty to do in this country, and many of us will have our poor throats cut; and that would be a great loss to the world. . . .!

"Such plunder, robbery and murder I have never read of in all history. Crowds of the unfortunate Afghans came round my tent the first two days after my arrival here. On the second day I flogged thirteen men belonging to the Kabul troops; but the greatest horrors were committed by Prince Timour's people. I soon stopped it in our army; but I referred the complaints against the Prince's people to him, and the Politicals.

"Well, even after this a number of men surrounded my tent . . . their bodies wounded and covered with blood. I had the plunderers seized, and they proved to

be followers of the Prince. I sent to say that I had no wish to interfere with his Highness's servants; but if he did not punish the robbers I *would*. The Politicals blustered in the name of the Prince . . . and when sunset came I had the fellows flogged in the presence of the poor inhabitants who had been wounded and robbed.

"I returned their property to them and they went away rejoicing. I told the Prince and Politicals that unless a stop was put to such atrocious conduct, I would separate my camp from theirs. I fancy they have represented the whole to the Kabul authorities, who will not, I should think, *dare* to write to me on the subject. Yet they *may*: and how it will end I neither know nor care. I will never allow such scenes in a camp under my command."

The "Kabul authorities" wrote, not to Kandahar, but to Simla. Sir Willoughby, though by no means friendly to Nott, set down a fair statement of the case. He regretted the necessity for punishment; but presumed it was not intended that the discipline of the army, or the national credit for justice, should be sacrificed to maintaining the dignity of Afghan princes. But Macnaghten—irate with every one who could not see the Shah and his objectionable family through rose-coloured glass—wrote, as only a man without humour could write, of "the deliberate outrage committed by General Nott on the dignity and feelings of the Prince."

As a matter of fact the Afghan, more callous and practical than his champion, had himself declared that the General Sahib was perfectly right; adding: "When I came through the Punjab, if Colonel Wade had not punished my camp followers daily, how could we have passed?" Needless to say, this remark was not transmitted to Calcutta: and Lord Auckland, nervously

anxious to keep Afghan princes quiet at all hazards, suffered himself to be more grievously ruffled than any royalty of them all.

Once again William Nott's stern courage and resolution brought the "high displeasure" of Government down on his devoted head. But, by the time it reached him, he was far too deeply absorbed in straightening out the muddled affairs of Khelāt to be properly impressed by the thunder of the gods. Not Khelāt alone, but the whole of Upper Sindh was in a ferment; and, as usual, political errors must be washed out by the blood of the sepoy and the obstinately brave Beluch. The conduct of this affair demanded all Nott's energies of brain and body. Yet he found time, as always, for exhaustive letters to his girls.

"We are truly in a delectable situation: Sir W. Macnaghten suffered himself to be deceived, and he, in his turn, deceived Lord Auckland, and between them they have endangered the life of every European in Central Asia. . . . I wrote letter after letter, begging that they would not separate my brigade into small detachments. They would not listen; and I know not what the result will be. . . . I am disgusted. They most unjustly dethroned Mehrab Khan, and put a tool of Shah Shujah's in his place. . . .

"Well, Mehrab Khan's son assembles his father's followers—and retakes Khelāt; our authorities talk big for a day or two; then send me instructions to offer terms to the boy, declaring that they will place him on his father's throne; and thus they disgrace the character of our country! Had they taken this boy by the hand when he was a wanderer in the land of his ancestors, there would have been a generous and honourable feeling; but to bend the knee to him and his bloody chiefs *now* is

disgraceful. The vain and rascally Shah Shujah has added a clause to the instructions I have received: the young hero boy must go up to Kabul to prostrate himself before his Majesty and *beg* for his father's throne, which he has already *gained!* . . . .

"The young Khan of Khelāt has refused the terms offered to him by our wise Minister and Envoy, and still swears that he will revenge his father's death. At a grand durbar he and all his chiefs swore upon that very convenient book, the Koran, that they would have their own terms, or die to a man. Poor people!

"Had I been allowed to act on my own judgment, when Khelāt fell into the hands of the rebels, the fortress would now have been in my possession, and the country in comparative quietness. But the authorities are never right, though they fancy themselves great men. They drink their claret, draw large salaries, and go about with a numerous rabble at their heels; the Calcutta Treasury is drained of its rupees, and *good-natured* Lord Auckland approves of all.

"In the meantime, everything goes wrong here. We are become hated by the people, and the English name and character, which two years ago stood so high and so fair, has become a byword. Thus it is to employ men selected by intrigue and patronage. . . . Nothing but force will ever make the Afghans submit to the hated Shah Shujah, who is as great a scoundrel as ever lived. The Minister objected to my bringing the 42nd with me from Kandahar, and Sir W. Cotton gave in to his opinion. The consequences are the Khan of Khelāt is insolent: Khelāt is not taken; my hands are tied; and the whole country in rebellion! Oh! they are a precious set, and a precious price John Bull will have to pay for all their fantastic tricks!"

Could Nott have visited Kabul in person and brought his terribly honest brain to bear upon things seen and heard in that centre of loyalty and devotion, it is to be feared that he would not have felt constrained to modify his sweeping strictures in any marked degree. For truth to tell, the double Government showed little sign of working more smoothly now than it had done at first.

Macnaghten might laud the King in letters to Simla as "merciful and kind-hearted," "the best and ablest man in the kingdom": but his people could have told another tale. He had much power for evil; since he could, and did, put his allies in the awkward position of having to enforce measures both unpopular and unjust. Worse than all, he set up, as Minister of State, a decrepit old priest named Mullah Shakore. The man had managed his stunted household at Ludhiana, and was therefore reckoned fit to manage affairs of state, in spite of the trifling drawback that his memory had gone the way of his ears, which had been "removed," in early days, on account of some offence against royalty. But if he could not remember the faces seen, from day to day, he managed to retain a very clear idea of the treaty between Great Britain and his master. Secretly, therefore, he impressed upon the people that Shah Shujah's infidel allies had violated that treaty by keeping a force in the country, interfering secretly in its management and inducing Afghans to look to them for favour.

"Though feeble in other respects," said Sir John Kaye, "this Mullah Shakore was not feeble in his hatred of the British. The Minister oppressed the people. The people appealed to the British functionaries. The British functionaries remonstrated with the Minister. The Minister punished the people for appealing. . . . So, bravely, for a time, worked the double Government at Kabul. . . .

It was, from the first, only a question of how long such a system could be propped up by the strong arm and the long purse of the king-makers."

But the farce of universal devotion, and the belief in a country steadily settling down under the new order, were still kept up, for the benefit of the Calcutta Government, by the king-maker-in-chief, whose happiness, in reunion with his wife, was marred at this time by official friction with his own folk: a too common feature of his rule. For, on the Shah's return to the Bala Hissar, it was necessary to complete as soon as might be those fatal cantonments, aptly and bitterly denounced as "the sheepfolds on the plain." The swampy stretch of ground given over to them, was, as has been said, well commanded on all sides by neighbouring forts and hills. Its high enclosing wall was replaced by a ditch and a weak field-work, bastioned at the corners; while the lines themselves were rendered less defensible than ever by crowding in upon them the compound of the British Mission, with its quarters and offices innumerable. Worse still, they were cut off by river both from the city and the Bala Hissar itself.

It is said that no objections were raised to the site offered by the Shah; while yet it is admitted that "no worse position could have been chosen." Impossible not to suspect that the Shah—jealous and restive at heart—was cunning enough to be well aware of the fact. But none seem to have entertained the idea, and certainly Macnaghten would have been shocked at the bare suggestion. Sturt, Durand's successor, made one last, abortive attempt—harem or no harem—to keep the troops within the fort; and failing, set his men to work outside upon the plain.

But if Sir Willoughby were satisfied, there was at least

one soldier in Kabul who looked with dismay upon the work that was already going forward when Head-quarters returned from Jalālabad. To Brigadier Roberts—a strong man and a fine soldier, then in command of Shah Shujah's force—both the site and the plan of those barracks-to-be appeared "most objectionable." Fearing that they might be destined for his own troops, he lodged a protest and suggested improvements. Sturt replied that the lines were for Cotton's force; that the foundations were half-laid, and it was "useless questioning now the expediency of any plan."

But Roberts had been head of the Building Department in India; and the longer he looked, the more he disapproved of a cantonment obviously insanitary and indefensible. A protest sent to Captain Douglas, A.A.G., brought the answer that Sir Willoughby approved. If the Brigadier had objections, he could state them to the Envoy. In spite of an implication that he was interfering unwarrantably, he did state them to the Envoy, who smiled affably; seemed much impressed; and did precisely nothing.

So Stuart's sappers and miners continued to erect that most tragical "folly on the plain," with the primary object, it would seem, of convincing the Afghans that they were neither feared nor suspected by the friends of their King. It was not even deemed necessary to place the Commissariat stores within the futile enclosure. They were lodged in a fort near by: and only the ammunition, with a strong guard, remained in the Bala Hissar—for a time.

It has been urged, in extenuation, that the cantonment was originally meant to be no more than a barrack-yard for peaceful occupation: that no man in his senses would have accepted such a site, nor any engineer have con-

structed such a work, had there been any idea of making it defensible. A plea of this nature serves only to shift the point of blame. For assuredly, in such circumstances and in such a country—where every village is a fortified post—no soldier of any sense and foresight would have sanctioned the building of cantonments other than defensible—let the Shah say what he would. But, from first to last, all things were sacrificed to a false show of security, that availed no man anything in the day of disaster—when the "floods came and the rain descended and beat upon that house," which was founded upon sand.

So the "folly on the plain" came rapidly into being; and the Brigadier registered a vow that his force, at all events, should be more suitably housed. But it was one thing to win Macnaghten's consent to a plan, and quite another to get it carried out. Hence renewed friction between two men innately unfitted to work in unison.

For Roberts, like Pottinger and Nott, was of the clear-eyed, resolute, straight-spoken type that rarely found favour in the Envoy's eyes. Had he ever analysed his feelings about either of these three, Macnaghten might have said, with Cæsar: "He thinks too much: such men are dangerous." As it was, he merely grew irritable, and began to wish the "intrusive" Brigadier elsewhere. Their mutual positions involved them in frequent controversy, almost amounting to clash of authority. Roberts regarded the Envoy as a sanguine visionary, diligently paving the pathway to disaster; while Macnaghten, for his part, resented the soldier's advice; denounced his keen insight as "imbecile fear"; his outspoken convictions as "little short of rank mutiny." So hard it is for the lion to lie down with the lamb, be he never so lamb-like.

As the summer advanced, signs of disquiet all over the

country impelled Roberts to protest against the unwisdom of lodging Government treasure in the heart of the city, where Captain Johnson, his paymaster, was living with Burnes. Strange to say, Macnaghten agreed; and the treasure was removed to the Bala Hissar.

But Johnson soon found it inconvenient to send so far for money; and, backed by Burnes, he appealed for a return to the former arrangement, adding: "The guard would strengthen our position here—two such valuable people!" The harassed Envoy found it simplest to say "Yes"; and the order was given. Roberts again urgently pointed out the risk involved: but Captain Johnson's convenience prevailed.

Result—when the crash came, the treasury was sacked; and £17,000 of public money—that should have been safe in the Bala Hissar—fell into the hands of infuriated Afghan chiefs. Johnson—who, by chance, had slept in Cantonments—did not, like so many others, pay the supreme penalty for putting his own comfort before the safety of Government funds.

But in the summer of 1840 it was heresy to suggest the possibility of a "crash." Hence the growing unpopularity of Roberts, who could not bring himself to make "an easy present, at the cost of a disastrous future." His attitude must have been the more galling to Macnaghten, because hints of a like nature were now beginning to reach him from all quarters. Letters appeared in Agra and Calcutta journals, impugning the Shah's popularity and the success of his government. In due time these found their way to breakfast tables at Kabul; and worse than all it began to be known at Calcutta how universally the Shah was disliked both by Afghan and British troops. Government comments on this head were too much for Macnaghten; and at last his

vexation overflowed in letters to his old friend John Colvin.

He complained bitterly of credence given to tales devised by "idle persons" who resented being detained in a land "not overflowing with beer and cheroots." His grievance grew with the telling of it. "And now, my dear Colvin," he went on, "you must allow me to disburden my mind to you. I have fancied I perceived lately a want of confidence in my proceedings, and a disposition to listen to every unfavourable report . . . while I do not receive the support to which the overwhelming difficulties of my position entitle me." Followed an allusion to controversies "thrust upon him" by Brigadier Roberts, of whom he wrote in no flattering terms; hopeful, no doubt, that supreme Authority might see fit to remove so obvious a thorn in the flesh.

But Lord Auckland—who looked eagerly for the day when Afghanistan should be emptied of all troops save the Shah's force—wrote decisively of his strong desire to uphold the military position of the Brigadier, whom he roundly applauded; adding that "every officer in the country should be led to look to him."

For Macnaghten, this was the last straw. If Government had lost confidence in him, he would resign: and again he wrote to Colvin, the private secretary, in the same injured strain. "If no important operations should be contemplated for next year . . . public money will be saved by the appointment of a less paid, though equally qualified agent. I have never yet served in an office where I had not the confidence of my superiors; and my inclination to do so is not strengthened after a laborious public life of thirty-one years."

But in the end ruffled vanity was smoothed down. Place and power were not to be lightly flung aside.

Instead, Macnaghten manœuvred the removal of Roberts from Kabul, even as he had displaced Pottinger at Herāt. The Brigadier returned to India, baulked and disgusted; but, like Keane, "he left a prediction behind him, and he knew, that, sooner or later, History would do him justice."

Thus were two "alarmists" banished from Macnaghten's sphere of influence; whilst Burnes' intermittent "croakings" were cleverly discounted in a letter to Lord Auckland, written soon after; a letter urging afresh the prompt annexation of Peshawur and Herāt; urging also the necessity for reliefs, as officers and men were grumbling and the troops fairly worn out.

"In a day or two," he wound up, "I shall send up officially, with my comments, a paper handed to me by Sir A. Burnes . . . on the prospects of this country. I hope to show that we are in as prosperous a condition as could have been expected. Sir A. of course wishes to prove the contrary; since, by doing so, when he succeeds me, his failures will find excuse, and his success additional merit. This is all natural enough."

But Burnes, grown cynically indifferent, had sought refuge in Tacitus and in philosophic reflections on the vanity of human wishes. Not so the most redoubtable "croaker" and "alarmist" of them all—William Nott, who—in the teeth of supersession, injustice and lack of appreciation—ceased not from exerting himself to the utmost, whenever opportunity came his way. For him, Macnaghten had secured Government censure. The attempt at stronger measures was reserved for a later day.

Meantime—while Nott was handling the Khelāt outbreak in his wonted masterful and masterly fashion—the fruit of Lord's superfluous zeal began to be felt in

Bamián and the regions round about. Not content with a position already too advanced for so weak a detachment, he seized the first opportunity of despatching a party to reconnoitre the more northerly passes beyond the valley of Saighan, where already his restlessness had created suspicion and alarm.

Now Saighan lies beyond the valley of Bamián; and beyond that again lies the territory of Kulam, where Jubber Khan still remained, doubtful lest acceptance of British protection might endanger his brother's life. Lord's advance had at least the merit of bringing his indecision to an end. On the 3rd of July he and the whole two hundred and fifty arrived at Bamián, prepared to accept "honourable asylum" at Macnaghten's hand. The Nawab, with his personal belongings, was allowed to occupy his own castle; and the Dōst's family party was established at Ghazni until further orders.

But Lord—never at rest—pushed his advanced guard farther still. An isolated fort, beyond Saighan, was discovered and occupied. Lord strongly commended retaining it as permanent frontier post. Sturt, a competent engineer, condemned the place; but Lord sent glowing letters to Kabul—and carried his point. Three hundred Afghan levies under Captain Hopkins were despatched to him; and for a while his triumph was complete. But, early in August, came news of a regrettable reverse, wherein two companies of Gurkhas, attacked in a defile, had only been saved from destruction by the chance arrival of Sturt with two more companies of the same gallant corps.

Macnaghten's nerves had lately been tried by a series of mortifying failures whose significance he was not the man to admit: and on the 12th he wrote to a friend: "All these little accidents happening at once are enough

to disgust one. But *Inshallah!* the Company's *Nasib* [1] will prove superior to them all!"

Yet, within the week, an intercepted letter threw startling light on the spirit underlying these "little accidents." A number of influential chiefs—setting aside their private feuds, and backed by Britain's faithful allies, the Sikhs—had combined to ferment a widespread rising in favour of that most unpopular tyrant—Dōst Mahomed Khan.

Macnaghten, distracted beyond measure, and now thoroughly alarmed, hurried off to take counsel with his Majesty. But the hour for taking counsel was already past. The hour for action was at hand. Thanks to the alarm created by Lord's activity, Dōst Mahomed had escaped from Bokhara and had been received with open arms by the Wāli of Khulam.

[1] Luck.

XXIV

At first the Shah and his Envoy could scarcely credit news so harassing for them both. But events very soon convinced them it was true.

After months of more or less polite confinement, Dōst Mahomed, the resourceful, was abroad again, fully determined, if followers were forthcoming, to regain his throne or fall in the attempt; and it is not too much to say that he owed this happy change of fortune mainly to the irritating activity of Dr. Lord in and around the valley of Bamián. For the zeal of that indefatigable officer had seriously alarmed the neighbouring chiefs of Khulam, Kunduz and Kokan. They, who had been jealous of the Amir in earlier days, now began to feel for him as the victim of aggressive infidels, whose disinterested benevolence seemed but a cloak for unlimited extension of their rule. Thus were the petty enmities between chief and chief gradually resolved into united enmity against the unbeliever.

So it came to pass that when the tyrant at Bokhara —foiled in his plan to secure the Dōst's family—forbade him and his sons to leave their house, even for religious worship, protests arose, where otherwise had been mere indifference. First the Shah of Persia, then the Amir of Kokan roundly rebuked the chief; the latter emphasizing his rebuke by a movement in force towards Bokhara. The movement sufficed. Dōst Mahomed and his sons were suffered to attend a mosque near by, without a

personal guard; nor were they slow in turning that permission to good account.

A daring plan was evolved, and daringly carried through. Mahomed Akbar with Sultan Jān was to flee in one direction; Dōst Mahomed, disguised as an Uzbeg, in another; thus confusing the trail. So, upon an evening of July, he slipped secretly forth; met his appointed guide, an Uzbeg horseman, in a by-way of the city; sprang up behind, and, all unrecognized, ambled away from the clutches of his over-hospitable host.

Some miles out, a goodly horse awaited him; and the two sped on, in such desperate haste that the Amir's mount fell lame. "Better a sound *yaboo* than a lame horse," quoth he; and taking his companion's pony soon left him far behind.

The guide, falling in with men from Bokhara in search of the lost Amir, bethought him cunningly that further money might be gained by betraying his trust.

"You have the prize in your grasp," said he. "There goes Dōst Mahommed on ahead. Catch him up while there is yet time."

But they laughed him to scorn.

"The Amir on such a sorry *yaboo*, and you, his follower, on a blood horse! A likely tale! It is *you* that are the Dōst disguised; and the prize is in our grasp indeed!"

Vain alike were remonstrance and denial. The man was caught in his own trap; and the Amir fled on, till his *yaboo* dropped exhausted by the way. But, his *kismet* being good, he fell in with a caravan; and feigning sickness, sought refuge in a camel *kajawar*,[1] which undignified conveyance brought him at last in safety to the territory of a friendly chief. Here, despite irate

[1] Camel pannier.

commands from Bokhara, a charger, a dress of honour, and a thousand horsemen were added unto him; and so, on to Khulam, where he heard with satisfaction of Kohistani chiefs goaded into rebellion by unpopular revenue officers; of Yar Mahomed threatening Kandahar; of fighting in Khelāt and Sindh.

All things seemed favourable for his reappearance on the scene; nor was it long before he and his friend the Wāli found themselves at the head of five thousand Uzbeg horsemen, *plus* kettledrums, standard and one priceless gun. A rough-and-ready army; but its numbers put fresh heart into the Amir, and fired both chiefs to make one determined bid for victory. They would cut up the Bamián detachment; emerge from the Hindu Kush; and, profiting by Shah Shujah's unpopularity, raise the whole countryside with the cry of *Jehád*. Kabul would be taken and Dōst Mahomed reinstated, with the Wāli for his Wazir.

It was a stirring programme; and, on August the 30th, they began upon Lord's little frontier outpost. They were repulsed; but the Gurkha officers, Codrington and Rattrey, wisely fell back upon Saighan; and thence again with Hopkins and his Afghan levies on Bamián.

There is nothing in war more demoralizing than retreat. Officers and men lost everything; and, worse than all, the atmosphere of the Hindu Kush, and the magic presence of Dōst Mahomed, proved fatal to the purchased loyalty of Shah Shujah's levies. Headed by their Commandant Saleh Mohamed (of whom more hereafter) they plundered their officers and went over in numbers to the standard of the Amir.

Cheerful news, this, for an Envoy whose optimism was already strained to breaking point. Weak as he was in troops, he must needs despatch Brigadier Dennie, with

the 35th Native Infantry and two hundred horse, to strengthen the detachment that should never have been sent to Bamián. Yet Kabul itself was in a very feverish state: the city was full of Sikh emissaries, openly hostile. People were shutting up shops and sending away their families. In the upper storey of the Bala Hissar gateway, Shah Shujah's band had been replaced by a guard of troops; and the beloved monarch dared scarcely venture abroad.

In this crisis Sir Willoughby wrote to Macnaghten: "I really think the time has arrived for you and I to tell Lord Auckland that there *is* no Afghan army; and that, unless the Bengal troops are instantly strengthened we cannot hold the country."

For once he was not labelled "croaker." Macnaghten lost no time in forwarding the General's verdict, emphasized by lamentations of his own. "Affairs in this quarter have the worst possible appearance. . . . At no period of my life do I remember being so much harassed as during the last month. The Afghans are gunpowder, and the Dōst a lighted match. Of his whereabouts we are wonderfully ignorant. . . . I have great fear that he will throw himself into the Kohistan, where, it is said, the whole country will rise in his favour. . . . The Shah Zadah's presence there is indispensable. He sets out this evening attended by all the chivalry of Kabul." A fine-sounding phrase, this; though what Kabul could boast in the way of chivalry, it were hard to guess.

But so full of surprises is the fortune of war, that even while Macnaghten sat pouring forth his woes on paper, Colonel Dennie was dispersing them with musket and sword.

On the 17th, news had reached him that bodies of cavalry were entering the valley through the great defile,

six miles from Bamián. A friendly village had been attacked; and next morning Dennie set out with three hundred sabres, five hundred bayonets and two guns, to make known the "posture of his blows" by punishing the enemy's advanced guard.

At once, the scouts fell back before him—and the astonishing truth stood revealed.

There confronted his little force, no mere advance guard, but an army of six thousand Uzbegs, led by Dōst Mahomed and the Wāli of Khulam. The heights bristled with them, and every post leading to the great defile was occupied in force. Irregular and undisciplined they might be, but they presented a formidable front. Dennie's little detachment, hopelessly outnumbered, depended for salvation on promptness, discipline and dash. To hesitate or even to await reinforcements were to lose the game, which is not the way of British officers who find themselves in a tight corner.

The advance was ordered. Gurkhas and Sepoys dashed forward, supported by Murray Mackenzie's guns. At each fort in turn the Uzbegs made a determined stand. But the guns were nobly served; and their fire made terrible havoc on dense bodies of men powerless to hit back.

It was the old story, a hundred times proven by history. Against discipline and dash numbers are of little avail. Before long, that formidable army was broken up and in full flight, with Anderson's Horse at their heels. Tents, kettledrums, standards and *the* gun —all were abandoned; Dōst Mahomed and his son being saved only by the fleetness of their mounts.

It was a proud day for Dennie, and for Lord, who promptly despatched a messenger to the Amir, proffering terms of honourable surrender. Dōst Mahomed sent

answer stoutly that he would conquer or fall. But fearing—not without reason—that defeat might affect the Wāli's fidelity, he fled post haste, by a devious route, resolved to raise a fresh army and fling himself into the Kohistan. Thither he would have gone originally. But even as Burnes, in '39, had sent money there, to stir up rebellion, so now, had he and Macnaghten descended to the Eastern device of despatching forged letters that warned the Dōst not to enter the Kohistan, as its chiefs had been bribed by the Feringhis to deliver him into their hands. For a time these warnings had checked and puzzled the Amir. But they did not tally with his own knowledge of facts; and in the end he decided to trust this last. So—while his late ally patched up a truce with Dr. Lord—the dauntless Chief rode up hill and down, through defiles and over passes, into that wild hill country north-west of Kabul, where all men awaited him, and his welcome was sure.

News of his escape tempered Macnaghten's delight at Dennie's victory; and reawakened his fear that, in spite of warnings, the Dōst might try his fortune in the Kohistan. There the chiefs grew daily more hostile, and it needed but the inspiring presence of the Amir to set the whole region in a blaze. Plainly something must be done—and that soon. Dōst Mahomed seemed a human Will-o'-the-wisp; here one moment, there the next. A veil of inviolate secrecy cloaked his every move; and though large sums were offered for news of him, only conflicting rumours came to hand. But the punishment of rebellious chiefs provided motive and scope for action. Hence the departure of Prince Timour and the "chivalry of Kabul," backed by a strong force under Sir Robert Sale. With them went Burnes, as Political Assistant, and his devoted Munshi, Mohun Lal.

For three weeks Sir Robert Sale scoured that inhospitable region, destroying forts and villages; marching hopefully hither and thither at the beck of rumour; but with never a sight of Dōst Mahomed Khan. The prolonged game of hide-and-seek was all in the Afghan's favour. He knew every inch of the country; and, warnings or no, the chiefs were his allies to a man. A fresh army had flocked to his standard; and with unabated energy he threaded defiles, scaled passes, and hovered on the outskirts of the British force, keeping it ceaselessly on the alert, yet baffling every attempt at surprise. For he did not lack adherents, even among the Shah's followers; and once a whole company of Kohistani levies went over to him in a body.

None the less were those three weeks as anxious and trying for the Amir as for Sir Robert Sale. To play hide-and-seek with the Feringhis on his own ground was a simple matter enough; but conviction grew in him that to drive them and their disciplined troops out of the country would prove a task beyond his power.

But while, from day to day, he deferred the ignominy of surrender, the long suspense began to tell severely on the nerves of Macnaghten and his Shah.

Nor was the tension relieved when, of a sudden, Kabul was electrified by definite news that the Dōst had appeared at Nijrāo—scarce fifty miles off—with a goodly following which daily increased in strength. A fever of consternation and excitement prevailed, and so inflammable was the state of the city that a concentration of troops, women and children in the Bala Hissar was predicted as the next move. Already guards were doubled and guns mounted on the citadel to overawe the town; while armourers carried on a brisk trade in the sharpening of daggers and swords.

The Envoy, anxious and irritable, began to think seriously of "setting a price on the fellow's head." Shah Shujah made no secret of his eagerness to "hang the dog"; and when Macnaghten mildly deprecated such severe measures, fell to taunting the Englishman on the mistaken leniency of his race.

"I suppose even now," said he, "if I were to catch the dog, you would prevent me from hanging him."

"It will be time enough to talk of that," returned the diplomatic Envoy, "when your Majesty *has* caught him."

But as he rose to depart, the Shah whipped out a letter from his kummerbund. Read *that*," said he, "from mine own brother!"

And Macnaghten read.

The letter was addressed to the Barakzai chief at Peshawur, and bore the seal of the old blind King, Shah Zemān. It contained a proposal that, with the aid of the Sikhs, he should try and regain the throne, since Shah Shujah had given over his kingdom to the infidels. Forgery or no, it filled Macnaghten with alarm, and effectually banished his merciful mood. Next day, in a long letter to Lord Auckland, he announced his intention of "showing no mercy to the author of all the evil that is distracting the country"; though, if caught, he would request his Majesty not to execute the Dōst till he had "ascertained his Lordship's sentiments."

But by that time October was drawing to an end; and the day of decision was nearer than any man believed.

On the 2nd of November it came—as such things most often come—in a fashion equally unexpected by all. On the 27th Dōst Mahomed left Nijrāo, whence he drew cautiously nearer to the capital with an army of some four thousand horse and foot: and on November 1, Sale's reconnoitring force discovered that their prize was no

more than twelve miles off in the Valley of Purwan Durrah.

It was a moment of intense excitement; and next day the troops set out, on a golden morning of autumn, fully determined to bring the long duel to an issue once for all. But on reaching the narrow valley, after a difficult march, the advance guard, under Colonel Salter, found that Dōst Mahomed's troops had broken cover from the forts and orchards and were rapidly making their way along the heights as if to retreat through the Purwan Pass.

Yet another escape was not to be tolerated. There, within sight and almost within reach, was the unseen foe they had been chasing for six weeks. A sky-blue standard indicated his position at the head of some two hundred horse; for the bulk of his army was afoot.

At once the cavalry prepared for action, and guns were pushed swiftly to the front. But unhappily Dr. Lord —who had joined the force—proposed that the 2nd Cavalry should execute a flank movement to prevent all chance of escape.

The two squadrons, under Captain Fraser, turned "threes about" to obey the order. But Dōst Mahomed, seeing that his retreat might be cut off, drew up at once, and prepared to descend the hill.

Rising in his stirrups, and lifting the great turban from his head, he cried aloud: "Now, in the name of God, we will conquer or die. Follow me all! Drive these Feringhis from the country—or I am a lost man."

And they followed him steadily, though not swiftly, down the broken slope; while Lord, in his fashion, exhorted Fraser's troopers. "See that blue flag?" he shouted. "*There* is Dōst Mahomed. A lakh of rupees for him—living or dead!"

In such a juncture advance was imperative; and Fraser

—beside himself at thought that the honour of capture might be his—promptly gave the countermand: "Front! Draw swords! *Gallop! Charge!*"

On that word, they were greeted by a brisk fire from Dōst Mahomed's infantry; and the officers dashed forward, never dreaming that their men would do otherwise than follow at full speed.

But the troopers—already half turned about—wavered; went forward merely at a trot; saw themselves cut off from their officers; saw those officers—all in a moment—surrounded, wounded, killed. Then did the Afghans, headed by Dōst Mahomed, charge gallantly down the slope in compact order, laying about them with their sabres at those faint-hearted troopers, who fled like scattered sheep; riderless horses careering in all directions.

Their Captains, Fraser and Ponsonby, desperately wounded both, were saved by their horses. Two subalterns were killed; and Lord—who had pluckily joined the charge—escaped out of the *melée*, only to be shot through the heart by a marksman from one of the forts.

The little force, watching from below, saw nothing but a wild jumble of men and horses; nor did they realize, till too late, how ill matters had gone for themselves. Fraser, dizzy and covered with blood—a fearful gash down his back, his right hand almost severed from the wrist—rode up and reported the disaster, with admirable coolness and control. He was then removed to the ambulance corps, stricken far more in heart than in body by the unaccountable disgrace of his regiment and the loss of his royal prize.

Though the guns had been drawn up, the enemy had passed out of range; and now, carrying their red banner to a rocky height, they planted it there, in defiant token of victory.

This was too much for the spirit of Robert Sale. The hill was fairly impracticable; yet he bade three companies, with two guns, storm it and dislodge that flaunting standard. The climb was a desperate one, under steady fire; but a sense of lost honour to be retrieved must have inspired all ranks;—and the thing was done. The Afghans descended on the farther side; and Sale's force lay down that night fully armed, expecting little or no rest.

But the hours of darkness passed unchallenged. Never a shot was fired. Those that were not in pain or anxiety slept sound; and when morning dawned, behold, three thousand men had melted away like dew.

Once again that piece of human quicksilver, the Amir, had slipped out of their grasp and was gone upon his wanderings—none could tell where.

XXV

TWENTY-FOUR hours after the fight, upon the evening of November the 3rd, Sir William Macnaghten and George Lawrence, attended by four sowars, were returning leisurely from their afternoon ride in the outskirts of the city. Both were cast down; and Macnaghten more than a little irritated. For, at starting, he had received a desperate note from Burnes, written soon after the disaster, urging that all troops be recalled and concentrated at Kabul for the defence of that city. Cheerful advice to a man responsible for English women and children, let alone England's policy and England's honour in that far corner of earth.

He had just glanced through the note again and returned it to his pocket. "Over-coloured, as usual, I'll be bound," said he. "Time to talk of recalling the troops when I hear from Sale. Hullo! whom have we here?" For while he spoke, an Afghan had galloped up behind; and now thrust himself unceremoniously between Lawrence and his Chief.

"Is *this* the *Lāt* Sahib?"[1] he panted.

"It is," replied Lawrence, and the man caught eagerly at Sir William's bridle.

"The Amir!" he cried. "The Amir!"

No words could have wrought a more electrical effect.

"What Amir? Who? *Where?*" exclaimed Macnaghten, too agitated for coherence.

But before the good man could reply, a second horse-

[1] The Lord Sahib.

man thrust him aside; sprang to the ground; and, capturing the Envoy's hand, pressed it first to his head, then to his lips.

Such obvious tokens of submission smote Macnaghten to a bewildered silence. He could not grasp, all in a moment, the full significance of an event so unexpected, so incredible, even in the face of facts. There must surely be some mistake—somewhere.

"Are you *indeed*—Dōst Mahomed Khan?" he asked slowly.

The Afghan inclined his head;—and for a long moment Macnaghten regarded "the author of all the evil," who was to expect no mercy at his hands.

Haggard and careworn, from the hard life of the past few months, his grey beard uncut and untrimmed, he yet looked a fine, powerful figure of a man in his prime. His eyes, as always, were full of life and fire; and his turban, set a little backward, revealed the remarkable angle of his brow. He had been twenty-four hours in the saddle; yet he showed no sign of fatigue.

Then Macnaghten dismounted also; for they were close to the residency gate.

"You are welcome, Amir Sahib—you are very welcome," said he; and taking the arm of Fraser's coveted prize, passed on through the Mission garden to his own room: the selfsame room wherein Dōst Mahomed had held court not two years ago.

Now he prostrated himself, and, removing his turban, laid his forehead upon Macnaghten's foot. Then rising, he presented his sword, still stained with the blood of British troops.

"It is yours," said he. "I have no further use for it."

But the Envoy, not unmoved by his enemy's gallant bearing, refused the gift.

"Why did you not come in sooner?" he asked. "Knowing you would receive honourable treatment?" and was told: "I have only come now because no man can control Destiny."

For two hours these sworn enemies sat talking, on the friendliest terms; and at the end of that time Sir William Macnaghten saw many things with new eyes.

It seemed that those two months of plotting and contriving had convinced the Dōst that, do what he might, no undisciplined army could hope to rid the country of British troops; and he had awaited only one successful contest that would enable him to surrender with untarnished honour. Now his anxieties were over; his mind at rest. By nature frank and communicative, he talked to all who came to greet him—Afghan or English—without embarrassment or reserve; asked eagerly after his family; and wrote at once to his sons, bidding them follow his example without loss of time. This they did; only excepting Akbar Khan, whose ingrained hatred of the British was not to be set aside even at a father's command.

Food was given to the Amir, and his entire wardrobe replenished from the Mission treasury. Yet—incurable Afghan as he was—it is said that he cunningly secured discount from the dealers for the whole amount paid! One of his wives, being still in Kabul, was sent for by Lady Macnaghten, who—in Mohun Lal's quaint phrasing—"conducted her to the presence of her long-separated lord, the Amir." Tents were pitched for his reception, and he was put under the immediate care of George Lawrence, who scarcely closed his eyes for the first two nights; while his charge slept as he had not slept these many weeks.

For ten days Dōst Mahomed Khan remained at Kabul:

a prisoner, honoured and honourable, winning the friendship and even admiration of all British officers who came to know him; though these religiously avoided the company of the King.

Shah Shujah alone refused to see his enemy, declaring that he could not treat "the villain" with common civility; and it is certain that Dōst Mahomed felt no desire to confront the man who had used the power of infidels to rob him of a throne, which his own arm had gained.

To Macnaghten, above all, he spoke so frankly and freely of his past life, his troubles and adventures, that the kind-hearted Envoy remembered no more that vindictive hint at execution penned in a moment of distraction. The Amir's "family"—a miscellaneous company of five hundred souls—was ordered to march from Ghanzi, and meet him at Peshawur; and on November the 12th, he departed from his own country—attended by a personal escort of fifty Afghan horsemen—in charge of Captain Peter Nicolson, the young political who had crossed swords with Nott after the Ghilzai campaign. As for the Envoy, so completely had his enmity evaporated, that he now found himself urging Lord Auckland, in all sincerity, to treat his prisoner at least as generously as Shah Shujah, if not more so. "For," argued he, "the cases are not parallel. The Shah had no claim on us. We did not deprive him of his kingdom; whereas we ejected the Dōst, in support of our policy, of which he was the victim."

Thus, in a rare moment of mental and moral illumination, did Macnaghten ingenuously denounce the very policy whereof he himself had been a prominent high priest; and Lord Auckland, no longer blind to the truth, made a tardy attempt at reparation by burdening the

Indian Treasury with a pension of two lakhs to one King, while he virtually supported two others upon their thrones. The Amir's destination was Ludhiana, where unhappily insult was added to injury, by lodging him in the same house whence Shah Shujah had been plucked to remove him from the throne.

And now indeed it seemed, to all concerned, that the Afghan war was over at last: the more so that, on the very day Dōst Mohamed surrendered, Nott had retaken Khelāt. The Home Government was beginning to change its tone of approval for one of alarm, amounting to blame: while this last astonishing turn of the wheel gave Macnaghten and Lord Auckland yet another priceless opportunity for proving, to England and India, the sincerity of their Afghan machinations.

"No more striking event could have been conceived," says Sir Henry Durand, "for the triumphant return of the Anglo-Indian Army to its own frontier. By furnishing so unhoped-for an occasion, Providence removed all reasonable ground of excuse or hesitation. But man in his short-sighted elation, clung to ill-gotten conquests; and, rejecting the proffered opportunity, was overtaken by a fearful and terrible retribution."

XXVI

Calcutta, Jan. 16, 1841.

"My dear Harriet,

"Your letter of the 28th October reached me on the last day of the year. I had given up all hope of hearing by that mail; and was bemoaning my hard fate and accusing you all of forgetfulness, when suddenly your letter, and two from Uncle Henry, arrived. You can have little idea how grateful the receipt of letters makes a wanderer like myself. I had been particularly cast down before; as several gentlemen in the same house had received bundles of letters. They were all nearly strangers; and I had gone to pass a few days there, while my lodgings were occupied by an officer's widow. Her husband had suddenly died, and my chum, who was getting married, volunteered the use of the house. . . .

"You mention that Lady Macnaghten says the name of Pottinger is a passport all over India. Of that I can assure you there is no doubt. But Smith and Johnson and Thompson, etc., are quite as good; and both pockets full of money a great deal better than all put together. . . . In consequence of Sir William Macnaghten's influence in favour of a friend of his, I am not to return to Herāt: so you can judge how much a name, ours or any other, weighs with Sir W. M. It is true I am indifferent about going back, but neither Macnaghten nor any one else knows that. I rather think he committed himself when he believed I was going Home; and has therefore obstinately persevered in trying

to remove me from a situation which was peculiarly mine. . . ."

So wrote Eldred Pottinger—now a Brevet-Major and a C.B. to boot—after a year of pen-and-ink drudgery in the enervating climate and uncongenial atmosphere of old Calcutta.

Save that he wore the soft shirt and smooth cloth coat of civilized manhood in the forties, the year had wrought little change, without or within. Only each week found him more "uncomfortable at sight of a pen"; more impatient to begone upon the active, stirring business of life, wherein alone his true self could find expression. In vain he had begged for leave, to be spent in further exploring. Lord Auckland's kindness was continuous; unasked, he spoke of future political employment; but, for the present, he would not let his unwilling prisoner go.

So, throughout the summer, Pottinger had endured the clockwork routine of eating, sleeping and scratching with a pen.

"I have no shooting or hunting, fishing or fighting," he complained to his favourite sister, Harriet, when the long hot weather was drawing to an end. "No time to try experiments, or do anything amusing to myself or others. I am therefore very sufficiently unhappy. The only act which has lately disturbed the routine of my life was accepting a challenge to walk three quarters of a mile in ten minutes at two in the morning! A gentleman took the bet, and we scuttled the distance in eight minutes; but I have been knocked up ever since. I am so enervated with this climate and constant fever."

For whatever friends he may have parted with, this one clave to him always, sapping his good spirits and his natural interest in any work on hand.

Happily, other old friends beside the fever remained to cheer him. The good Hakeem had become a permanent member of his household; so also had the men of his Herāti escort. His boys had been placed as students in the Hindu College; and Allah Dad Khan, after three years of faithful service, had returned to his own country, armed with a written commendation of his "great honesty and fidelity under many temptations and the abuse of co-religionists." Better still, his services were brought to the notice of the Bombay Government, with a view to future employment; and for present reward he had received the lordly sum of 2000 rupees.

So much for the past. For the present—though the cold weather brought mitigation of illness and discomfort, it brought also the inevitable round of station gaieties, little congenial to his taste; the less so, that he must now submit to an attempt at lionizing—mercifully of short duration. For what hostess could make anything of a lion who was neither to be flattered nor cajoled into talking of his own exploits; a lion whose roaring was gentler than that of "any sucking dove"; since it was, for the most part, inaudible. Like George Lawrence, the amiable young ladies of Calcutta found him "not very bright." Disappointment supervened. Alas, there was no denying it:—socially, the "hero of Herāt"—as men called him—proved a very uninteresting person, not worth the exertion of flattering.

Little did they dream, good women, that, in his secret heart, he was devoutly thankful when they discovered the fact and gave him up in despair. It was ordeal enough to stand for a full-length portrait, in Afghan dress; though the compliment pleased him not a little. For the rest, his C.B., his promotion, and further employment were all the recognition he asked. The

former had been bestowed upon him early in 1840; the latter was yet to come.

During that same winter Lord Auckland had received no less than three tributes from Herāt to his gallantry and devotion; one from D'Arcy Todd, the others from his old comrades and antagonists, Yar Mahomed and Shah Kamrān. Todd, having heard on all sides the true story of that critical assault on the 24th of June, rejoiced that the privilege was his of sending to Government the first official report of the incident.

"The presence and skilful advice of Lieut. Pottinger," he concluded, "had defeated all the previous efforts of the Persians; but on the occasion of this assault, he may be fairly said to have saved the city by his own individual gallantry; and in talking on this subject (in the absence of the Minister) this fact is generally allowed by all Afghan officers."

As for the Wazir and Kamrān, their letters were of much the same tenor. "Lieut. Pottinger," wrote the Shah, "performed during the siege most eminent services; never failing to exert himself strenuously on my behalf. Such exertions merited the highest reward that can be bestowed; but I had it not in my power to confer on him a suitable mark of royal favour. Now, as the interests of both States are one, it is needful that your Lordship bestow on him a suitable reward. I am most particularly anxious on this point."

It is to be hoped that his anxiety was relieved when he learnt that the young Queen of England had graciously gazetted her gallant subaltern—a Brevet-Major and Companion of the Bath.

Pottinger's own anxiety increased rather, as he watched from afar—throughout his year of drudgery and stagnation—the slow oncoming of the inevitable at Herāt; and

that through deliberate disregard of his hard-won experience, his urgent advice.

News wandered leisurely down to Calcutta, arriving months after the event. But, in the fullness of time, it did arrive: and thus, from occasional letters, from newspapers, and talks with Lord Auckland, he learnt how Yar Mahomed cheerfully carried on his double game, in defiance of treaty; how John Login had won so great favour with all the royal household that the ladies called him "brother," and Kamrān was persuaded to ride abroad with his friend the "Hakeem Sahib," after eighteen months of confinement in the Citadel; how Abbott and Shakspear had been despatched on separate missions to Khiva, where they hoped to prevent a clash with Russia by procuring the liberation of her slaves; and how—in spite of Yar Mahomed's secret efforts to thwart them—both missions proved a triumph of courage and character worthy of England's best traditions.

On the whole, Pottinger sympathized with Macnaghten's change of front towards Herāt. He believed that nothing short of an armed force at its gates would check Yar Mahomed's propensity for political flirtation. But the Home Government had begun to call in question Lord Auckland's entire Afghan policy; and Sir Jasper Nicolls, now Commander-in-Chief, was so frankly disgusted with the whole affair that no further demand for troops was likely to receive his sanction. Reliefs had already been despatched to Kabul: that must suffice.

Wherefore Lord Auckland pursued undiscouraged the old futile policy of conciliation. By way of beginning the year 1840 with a clean slate, and proving his recognition of the Wazir's past services (in defence of his own country!), it had pleased him to send Yar Mahomed, as New Year gift, an assurance of free pardon for all

offences against treaty committed before the arrival of his letter at Herāt; coupled with a hope that his Lordship's leniency might have a good effect on the future conduct of his ally, in name, if not in fact.

To Yar Mahomed, this mark of generosity argued weakness rather than strength. It reached Herāt in February; and not until many months later did Lord Auckland learn that, in January—when £100,000 of British money had been poured into the bottomless coffers of Herāt—Yar Mahomed had induced Kamrān to assure the Shah of Persia that his very faithful servants merely tolerated the English Envoy from expediency; that, although the latter was far from niggardly, their true hopes rested, as always, in the Asylum of Islam. At the same time the Wazir had written, on his own account, to the Russian Ambassador in Tehrān, requesting that a Russian Agent be sent at once to Herāt.

Lord Auckland's feelings, on the revelation of this double act of perfidy, are not on record. But the word of pardon had gone forth; and these trifling delinquencies must be overlooked with the rest.

Yar Mahomed, discomposed for the moment by the untoward accident of discovery, professed unbounded gratitude for his Lordship's clemency; and in practical proof thereof, declared that if Todd would advance him £20,000 to equip a force, he would at once expel the Persians from Ghoriān.

The bait took.

Todd, strangely credulous, and anxious to please Macnaghten, advanced the money; while Yar Mahomed—amazed at this fresh proof of Feringhi weakness—wrote at once to his friend the Persian General that although the British Agent was urging an attack on Ghoriān, Persia need have no fear for the result. None the less

did zealous preparations go forward under the eye of Todd, who never understood his man as Pottinger had done. Then at the last, when all was ready, Yar Mahomed, the invincible, gravely put forward a frivolous, yet ingenious, pretext against the venture; and the whole scheme fell to the ground.

Todd may well have felt foolish; while the Wazir laughed up his sleeve at a forbearance which it seemed would be stretched to the utmost length, sooner than relations should be ruptured between England and Herāt.

In due time, news of this flagrant manœuvre found its way to Calcutta; and Pottinger—realizing to the full Yar Mahomed's contemptuous elation—felt impelled to offer a grave word of warning. In addition, he declared himself ready to return at once to Herāt and do his utmost to mend matters, *if* he were permitted to throw overboard, once for all, the fatal policy of conciliation.

For answer he was politely told that Government saw no reason to change its policy; that he need not concern himself about Herāt affairs, as Lord Auckland had already proposed him to Macnaghten for service on the frontier of Turkestan. None the less was the Governor-General moved to write his mind strongly in respect of the great extension given by Major Todd to the system of pecuniary advances to the Wazir. These were, in future, to be discontinued; the Herāt subsidy being fixed at the rate of £2,500 a month.

And what of D'Arcy Todd—he who had so ardently craved political distinction?

In November '39 he had written in high elation, to his brother Fred, of his permanent appointment at Herāt, on a salary of 2000 rupees a month. "You will, dearest Fred, agree with me that I am a very fortunate fellow," he had concluded, in the fullness of his content. Yet

February found him writing to that same brother in quite another strain.

News of his father's death had stirred his sensitive nature to its depths; and he was learning now, from painful experience, the truth of Pottinger's quiet remark that hopes did not flourish in the soil of Herāt. Of a more impressionable and less resolute temper than the younger man, he had found the insidious influence of environment harder to resist. Though blest with such inspiriting companionship as Pottinger had never known, his lamp of the spirit had waxed so dim that almost the light within him was darkness. His letter is a veritable cry from the depths.

"I have little time to brood over private sorrow. I live in a whirl of constant employment and interruption, and my public duties occupy my thoughts night and day, to the exclusion, I fear, of much that is of higher importance. Such is the effect of 'things that are seen' . . . unless our spiritual eyes are enlightened by the grace of God.

"I have placed myself in a false position by grasping at the high places of the world. . . . Fred, pray for me! I have preached to others, and yet I feel myself a castaway. . . . My life is one long neglect of spiritual things, of hardness of heart. Having eyes, I see not. Having ears, I hear not. All this, I know, will give you exquisite pain . . . and these reflections should send me to my knees. But I cannot pray. . . . All is darkness before me. The world and the world's love absorb past and present; and the future—— But I cannot go on in this vein. . . .

"May God bless you, dearest of brothers. Do not believe one word of what you may see in the newspapers. Our situation is pleasant, and we are quite as safe as

people who walk down Oxford Street in a thunderstorm!"

Two months later, he wrote in a more hopeful strain: "All is quiet here. We are on the best possible terms with the authorities of the place; and I believe Yar Mahomed Khan is beginning to understand that honesty is the best policy: but I have had no easy task of it to keep my ground. . . ."

Scarcely had that letter been dispatched, when the Persian and Russian invitations sent in January came suddenly to light. So little did Todd understand the nature of his foe in friend's clothing.

From that time onward the task of keeping his ground grew more difficult and more costly, month by month. Rupees were poured out like water on a soil that yielded no fruit. Where Pottinger had spent thousands, Todd spent lakhs: and still Yar Mahomed ceased not from demanding advances, and again more advances, on behalf of schemes that were nominally for the people's benefit; actually, for his own. And still he ceased not from secret "conversations" with Mahomed Shah; for dread of Persia had long since been extinguished by the worse dread of an infidel yoke, engendered and nourished by the sweeping ramifications of British negotiation and intrigue.

Wherefore, when the Ghoriān affair put an end to advances, the old hatred of Feringhi interference revived, and grew apace; so that, in August 1840, Kamrān informed his friend, John Login, that but for his royal protection, not one among them had been left alive. The fall of Khelāt, followed by the apparent success of Dōst Mahomed in the Hindu Kush, had lifted the Wazir to fresh heights of daring. He threatened Kandahar; and, but for the Amir's timely surrender, would un-

doubtedly have used that threat for further extortion. As it was, he kept quiet for a space; so that Todd found leisure to breathe—uneasily enough, and to wonder what would be the next move.

In January 1841 it came.

By that time the Durānis round Kandahar had grown restless to the verge of rebellion; and again Yar Mahomed bethought him of that city. Secretly and suddenly, he sent a deputation to the Persian Government at Meshed, suggesting a combined attack; demanding money for expenses; and promising, by way of prelude, to expel the British from Herāt.

This glaring act of perfidy at last brought matters to a climax. Todd rightly felt that to let it pass unrebuked would be fatally lowering to British prestige; while yet the bogey of conciliation hampered his every act and word. By way of compromise, he announced, on the 1st of February, that Kamrān's monthly allowance would be withheld till the pleasure of Government were known; and quietly awaited the storm.

Both Afghans were fairly taken aback by this sudden display of strength where they had hitherto found "a mush of concession." The Wazir excused himself on the plausible plea that British tactics in Afghanistan made him fearful for his country's ultimate fate; and artfully parried Todd's blow by offering, on certain conditions, to allow of a British garrison at Herāt.

Again he had cunningly baited his hook. Todd knew well that this was Macnaghten's dearest wish: but the conditions, backed by a string of arrogant demands, made him give pause. These included immediate payment of two lakhs; a larger allowance; advances on loan; payment of his personal debts (two lakhs) and a written assurance of Herāt's future independence—demands no

British Envoy could possibly concede on his own authority.

Todd—loth to refuse—agreed to pay the two lakhs, if Yar Mahomed would send his son, as guarantee, to Fort Ghirisk near Kandahar, there to await Government sanction and to escort the garrison up to Herāt. But guarantees were not in the bond: and Yar Mahomed, relying partly on Todd's eagerness, partly on growing Durāni unrest, ventured the bold ultimatum; immediate payment—or withdrawal of the Mission from Herāt.

For once he had pushed his insolence too far. To withdraw the Mission was a grave step; but Todd believed—and Login no less—that submission to payment enforced by threat were sheer disgrace to the name of Englishmen; an act outside the pale of consideration. Wherefore, to the Wazir's amazement and genuine alarm, Todd sent answer that the Mission would leave Herāt at once.

Their departure was prompt and unopposed; though Yar Mahomed, in his anger, came near to murdering them all before they left.

In the city, when the news was known, violent excitement prevailed. The people took up arms; guns were fired off in all directions; a dense crowd, friendly and unfriendly, thronged about the usual gate of departure. But Todd's party—three British officers and three hundred retainers—went quietly out by another gate. And so an end of that noble, but mistaken Mission to Herāt.

They made their way in safety toward Kandahar; and Yar Mahomed, increasingly alarmed, sent after them such a letter as he well knew how to write: a letter that should shield him from blame, by proving that his friends the British officers had causelessly taken offence.

"Thou departedst—and my assembly was broken up.

My assembly and my heart were alike broken up by thee!" Such was the burden of his lament, followed by elaborately skilful self-justification; and, in conclusion, more outpourings of personal grief. "Oh, brother, what has happened, that you have so quickly given up the fruit of your own toil? If I deserve punishment, chastise me: if kindness, let it be displayed. Oh, my brother and friend, *why* this departure and this haste? You might at least have spoken of the matter, have weighed the *pros* and *cons*, and then have gone. Now—wherever you may be, God be with you."

Thus Yar Mahomed, arch-liar and traitor: but his impassioned lamentation evoked no answer from D'Arcy Todd. Arrived at Kandahar, he halted his little party; and there awaited, with equanimity, Lord Auckland's judgment on his decision.

If he had any misgiving, it was on the score of patience and forbearance carried too far. But his news reached Lord Auckland at a singularly inopportune moment. He knew—though Todd could not—that England and Persia were on the eve of settling those differences which alone gave importance to Yar Mahomed's intrigues; and he was fairly exasperated by a rupture that would cast ridicule on his entire Afghan policy, by proving to all India that Herāt feared British intervention more sincerely than Persian conquest. To a friend, he wrote: "I am writhing in anger and bitterness over Major Todd's conduct at Herāt." In fact he—the calm and cautious—fairly lost his temper, as even Governor-Generals will. Without waiting for a word of explanation or defence, he repudiated and condemned the entire transaction; dismissed Todd from political employment, and remanded him, with disgrace, to his regiment in India.

It apparently mattered nothing to Lord Auckland that

the Mission left Herāt unsullied; for unhappily, at that moment, success was the one thing needful. Had Todd beaten Yar Mahomed with his own weapons, undiscovered—he had been lauded and honoured. Since he could not so demean himself, he reaped censure and disgrace.

As for Todd, he was amazed and stricken to the heart by Lord Auckland's injustice, his own degradation and the shattering of his dearest ambition in life.

"This affliction," he wrote to the brother who shared his heart and his hope—"for it is an affliction to be held up to the scorn of men as a demented coward—was doubtless intended for some wise purpose. I have set up many idols and worshipped them with mad devotion; but they have been cast down before me by an Invisible Hand; and I have been taught that God will not brook a rival in the heart of man."

Thus the wheel had come full circle: and all was as it had been there years before; save that a grand total of £200,000 had been paid by India as the price of a friendship never secured. Todd found characteristic consolation in the thought that the money might be regarded as having been spent "in the great cause of humanity"; though it is to be feared that the bulk of it went rather to establish and strengthen that personification of inhumanity—Yar Mahomed Khan. He had proven, triumphantly, the old Indian saying: "Great is the power of the white man: greater the power of a lie." For three years India's treasury had been heavily burdened to ensure his goodwill—without avail.

Small wonder, then, if Eldred Pottinger—musing on the first phase of his Afghan service so untimely ended—were tempted to believe that his own years of effort and endurance had also been of no avail. That he was not justified in this belief is certain: for who is there so

perfect in knowledge that he shall dare to say of any honest work—It was in vain.

Let it be rather said—of Pottinger, as of Todd—"A spirit goes out of the man who means execution, which outlives the most untimely ending."

In the unequal duel with Yar Mahomed both Englishmen were foredoomed to fail. But if little had been achieved politically, there remained the fact that much misery and cruelty had been checked; that trade and agriculture had been revived; the population trebled, and the character of the British nation raised as it had been raised nowhere else in Afghanistan. Moreover, Pottinger's geographical and political Memoir, had, in Lord Auckland's opinion, materially increased Government knowledge and understanding of its own immediate theatre of action, the trans-Indus Borderland.

Nor can the effect of a man's work on his own soul be justly overlooked: and for Eldred Pottinger those years of action, endurance and responsibility had been, without question, the most formative years of his life. He had gone forth little more than a boy—manly, self-reliant, eager for adventure and hazard: he had returned, a man, tried many times in the furnace, and proven sterling metal throughout; an implement finely tempered and prepared for the larger work, the deeper suffering, that still awaited him in that arena of ultimate Nemesis—Afghanistan.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE story of Eldred Pottinger's return to Afghanistan, of the Kabul disasters, the imprisonment and final vengeance, is told in another volume, entitled *The Judgment of the Sword.*

M. DIVER.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BRUNSWICK ST., STAMFORD ST., S.E., AND BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

SKELETON MAP
to illustrate
POTTINGER'S JOURNEY
SCALE
BOKHARA
R. Oxus
KHULAN
KUNDUZ
MERV
TURKOMANS
MESHED
SARAKHS
Jurbat
SAIGHAN
PARWAN PASS
PAROPAMISUS RANGE
Ghurian
Parwana
HERAT
Ilan Sud R.
AFGHANISTAN
HAZARAH COUNTRY
HINDU KUSH
Charikar
Istalif
KOHISTAN
LAGHMAN
MAIDAN
KABUL
Gandamak
PASHAWUR
R. Indus
GHAZNI
RAWAL PINDI
PERSIA
FARAH
GIRISHK
KANDAHAR
LAHORE
R. Helmand
CHAMAN
KHOJAK PASS
Toba
Pishin
QUETTA
SHAL
BOLAN PASS
SEISTAN
MULTAN
FEROZEPORE
DESERT
Mastung
Sibi
Dadar
KHELAT
Bagh
CUTCH
GUNDAWA
R. Indus
BALUCHI
Shikarpur
Sukkur
Khyrpur
Larkhana
SINDH
PUNJAB
LITTLE DESERT
RAJPUTANA
KARACHI
HYDERABAD
WANGA
Tatta
WESTERN RUN
CUTCH
Bhuj

CONSTABLE'S SHILLING SERIES

Queed

By
HENRY SYDNOR HARRISON

"A very fine tale . . . Engrossing all through . . . powerfully dramatic."
The Daily Telegraph.

The Old Dominion

By
MARY JOHNSTON

"Since Thackeray wrote 'The Virginians' there has not been produced a more charming picture of life in Virginia in the old colonial days."—*Daily Mail.*

The Professional Aunt

By
Mrs. GEORGE WEMYSS

"Altogether charming."
Daily Mail.

In the Quarter

By
R. W. CHAMBERS

"A capital novel of Bohemian life in Paris."
Glasgow Evening News.

By Order of the Company

By
MARY JOHNSTON

"A tale of ingenious exciting adventure, at once catching the attention, and holding it from first to last."—*Globe.*

The Corner of Harley Street

By
PETER HARDING, M.D.

"I have read it, and now I am going to read it again."
Punch.

CONSTABLE'S SHILLING SERIES

Ghosts of Piccadilly

By

G. S. STREET

"A charmingly written review of the literary and historical figures and memories that haunt the famous thoroughfare."—*Scotsman.*

The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft

By

GEORGE GISSING

Mr. W. L. COURTNEY, in the *Daily Telegraph*, applies Swinburne's phrase to this book: "Oh, golden book of spirit and of sense."

Audrey

By

MARY JOHNSTON

"A powerful piece of work, for which one has nothing but admiration and praise."

Bookman.

Selected Poems

By

GEORGE MEREDITH

"A book every admirer of English literature should possess."—*Glasgow Times.*

Sir Mortimer

By

MARY JOHNSTON

"A charming story."

The Sphere.

Lewis Rand

By

MARY JOHNSTON

"This is not a story which passes, but remains among the memorable works of fiction."

Daily Telegraph.

CONSTABLE'S SHILLING SERIES

An Unsocial Socialist

By

BERNARD SHAW

"One of the most delightful things Bernard Shaw has ever written."—*New Witness.*

Bachelor Betty

By

WINIFRED JAMES

"Miss Winifred James' charming story."

Literary World.

The Irrational Knot

By

BERNARD SHAW

"'The Irrational Knot,' as a study of marriage, is interesting for its anticipation of the ideas now almost inseparably associated with the writings of Ibsen."—*Northern Whig.*

Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come

By

JOHN FOX, Junr.

"A wholesome and delightful volume."

Western Morning News.

Love among the Artists

By

BERNARD SHAW

"Fresh and exhilarating."

Northern Whig.

The House of Cobwebs

By

GEORGE GISSING

"This batch of posthumous stories are all alive with Gissing's characteristic touch."

Times.

CONSTABLE'S SHILLING SERIES

Cashel Byron's Profession

By
BERNARD SHAW

"As fresh and as applicable to the circumstances of the time as when it was written thirty years ago."
Northern Whig.

New Worlds for Old

By
H. G. WELLS

"One of the most remarkable of his works."
Manchester Guardian.

The Hero of Herat

By
MAUD DIVER

"A tale as strange as any fiction . . . of many far off and unhappy things which should never be forgot if England is to keep alive some of the most characteristic and heart-stirring of her traditions."—*Observer.*

Peter Moor

By
GUSTAV FRENSSEN

"It has, more than any book I can remember reading, the art of Defoe's 'Captain Singleton' and 'Plague Year.'"
The Westminster Gazette.

The Fighting Chance

By
R. W. CHAMBERS

"A most attractive novel."
Punch.

Human Bullets

By
LIEUT. SAKURAI

"The book must be read as a whole by all who would learn something of the terrible circumstances of modern warfare."—*Daily Telegraph.*

CONSTABLE'S SHILLING SERIES

Will Warburton

By

GEORGE GISSING

"The dialogue is deliciously crisp and clever."

Pall Mall Gazette.

Lost in the Post

By

F. A. LUTYENS

"A lively little love-story told by means of letters."

Birmingham Daily Post.

Jewel

By

C. L. BURNHAM

"The subtleties of the author's religion are simplified down to the most appealing tenderness of feeling."—*Bookman.*

Thoughts on Life and Religion

By

MAX MULLER

Being Passages selected from his published and unpublished Writings, edited and arranged by his widow.

Love Letters of a Worldly Woman

By

Mrs. W. K. CLIFFORD

"Mrs. Clifford has unlocked the secrets of the heart of early womanhood with a sure understanding."—*Bookman.*

Pan-Germanism

By

ROLAND USHER

"Professor Usher's exhaustive study of Pan-Germanism is peculiarly interesting."

LORD SYDENHAM in the *Edinburgh Review.*